FATEFUL YEARS

1909–1916

SERGE SAZONOV

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Fateful years, 1909-1916

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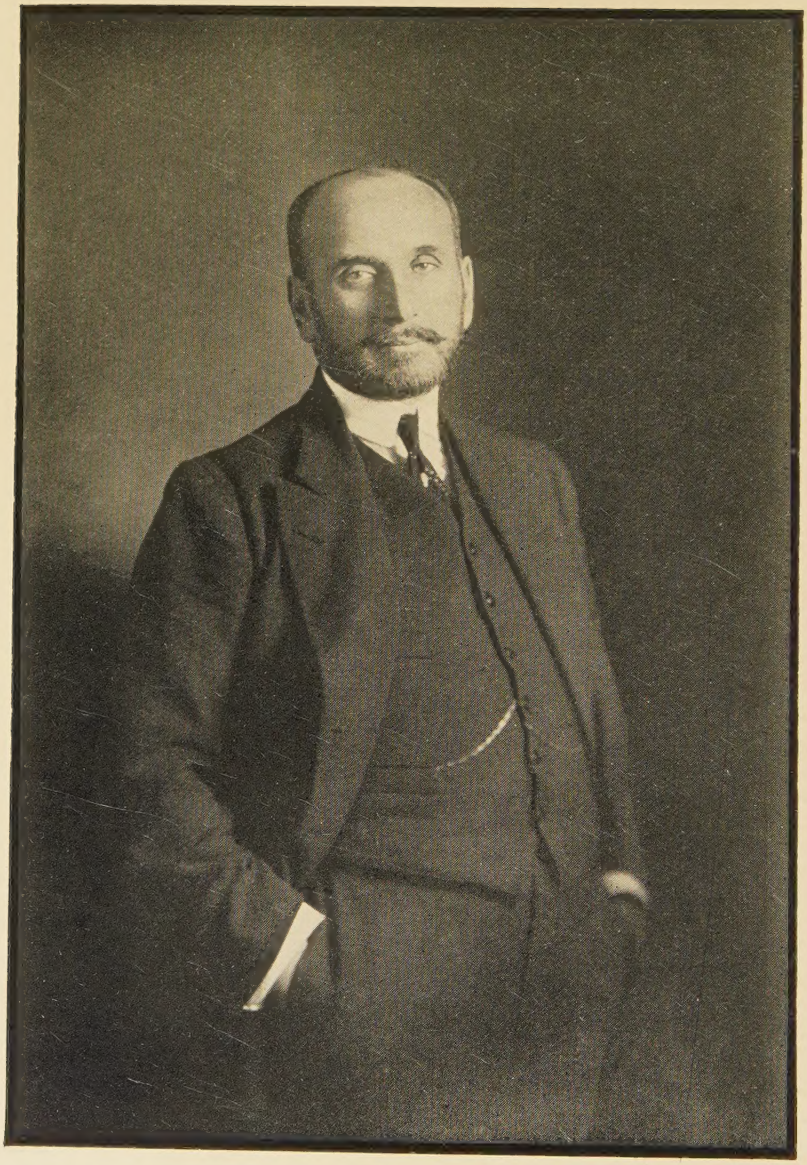

SERGE SAZONOV

FATEFUL YEARS

1909-1916

The Reminiscences of

SERGE SAZONOV

G.C.B., G.C.V.O.

Russian Minister for Foreign Affairs : 1914

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FOREWORD

THE catastrophe which overwhelmed Europe in July, 1914, the effects of which made themselves felt more or less over the whole world, cannot yet be made the subject of scientific historical investigation. So immense a task is beyond the powers of those who witnessed and still more of those who were directly concerned in it. It must be left to the rising generation, in the hope that their remoteness from these events will ensure for their labours the necessary freedom from prejudice and that they will have access to historical material more complete than that already available, important as that is.

It is inevitable that the work of eye-witnesses and participators should be of a more modest kind, taking the form of personal contributions to the general mass of information concerning events unparalleled in the history of humanity, from the dawn of the Middle Ages to our own time. A general appreciation of the historical documents now at our disposal, the indispensable scrutiny of each followed by a final judgment, are still impossible, for the world struggle which began in 1914 did not end with the defeat of Germany and her Allies in October, 1918; it still continues, although in another form and on other soil. The Peace of Versailles gave no peace to humanity, a fact of which I imagine even its authors now entertain no doubt, although they are responsible for its decisions, some of which contain the germ of inevitable conflicts between various peoples in the near future.

What does Europe expect from that institution, the League of Nations, devised by the Peace Conference of 1919? Its spirit is nearer to the political Utopias of the eighteenth century than to our iron age: will it save her from fresh convulsions? No one can give a confident answer to this question. All that is clear to every one is that humanity is suffering from a fearful sickness, and that the hour of convalescence is not yet near.

After a long period of hesitation, due to the unfavourable situation in which I find myself for undertaking a task of this kind,[1] I have nevertheless decided to publish my recollections of the manner in which the catastrophe was gradually pre-

[1] I wrote these notes in Prague, where none of the material preserved in the archives was available to me.

pared, of how it overtook Russia, and of the steps taken by the Russian Government to avert it. I do this from a sense of the duty I owe to my country, and to my contemporaries, who are incompletely or incorrectly informed concerning those events from various foreign sources. Naturally such information as emanates from the hostile camp represents the actions of the Russian Government in an unfavourable light. Information from other sources, which are either unprejudiced or sympathetic, nevertheless fails to answer many of the questions put by thinkers in present-day Russia to those who filled an active rôle in the fateful occurrences of 1914 and the subsequent years.

Perhaps my reminiscences, despite their unavoidable lack of completeness, will prove to be of some value as material to the historian of the future, when the time comes for contemporary chronicles and personal recollections to give place to the unimpassioned and impersonal investigations of scientific history.

Those who read these short recollections must not expect to find in them a consecutive and full exposition of the course of the historic events of which I was a witness, or in which I participated, but only my personal estimate of them in the light of the information which I possessed. They will find these occurrences set out objectively in the official compilations of diplomatic documents published, both at the beginning of the European War and later by the Governments of the belligerent Powers, and also in the endless literature published in every language during recent years, and referring, not only to the actual war period, but also to the period that preceded it.

October, 1927. S. D. SAZONOV.

FATEFUL YEARS

CHAPTER I

In May, 1909, the Minister of Foreign Affairs, M. Isvolsky, offered me the post of Under-Secretary of State, which had become vacant on the appointment of M. Charikov as Ambassador in Constantinople. I was then Russian Minister to the Vatican, a post which I had held since 1906. When, after a break lasting many years, the Russian Government renewed official relations with the Roman Curia in 1894, a mission was established there, with Isvolsky at its head, I was appointed secretary, having previously spent four years in London as Second Secretary of our Embassy. During the first years of its new existence, the Russian Mission to the Vatican possessed considerable political significance, which declined, however, after the death of Pope Leo XIII, when his Secretary of State and intimate collaborator, Cardinal Rampolla, also withdrew from public affairs. Leo XIII was a man of statesmanlike mind; very few of his predecessors during the last three centuries have attained a higher degree of culture or a greater breadth of view. The international prestige of the Papal Throne, and the social and economic questions which, during his papacy, had acquired such immense importance in the life of all European countries, occupied his attention to a greater degree than his spiritual rôle as head of the Roman Church. Had he lived in the Middle Ages, or during the Italian *risorgimento*, he would have been a Gregory, an Innocent, or a Julius, according to the spirit and the historical possibilities of the time, for he was by nature an active politician rather than a spiritual pastor. The same may be said of his talented assistant, Cardinal Rampolla. The representative of a Great Power possessing a large Roman Catholic population found it easier to work in harmony with men of this type than with his successor, Pius X – a man worthy of all respect, but a stranger to politics. His Secretary of State, the Spanish Cardinal Merry del Val, was an excellent linguist, but lacking in political capacity.

The papacy of Leo XIII was a period of fruitful work for the Russian Mission to the Holy See. The Pope manifested a conciliatory attitude towards the Russian Government, which in its turn acceded to some of his wishes with regard to legislation

affecting the interests of Russian Catholics. Much yet remained to be done in this connection. Above all it was necessary that the Russian Government should break away from those rooted customs and prejudices which, intensified by the terrible recollections of the Polish rebellion, hindered the reconciliation of Imperial Russia with her Polish subjects, a reconciliation indispensable in the interests of both. Unfortunately neither Isvolsky nor his successors, of whom I was one, achieved satisfactory results in this respect; and political misunderstandings continued to vitiate the atmosphere of purely religious questions. These abnormal relations owed their origin, on the one hand, to the harsh methods of our Department for Spiritual Affairs in dealing with foreign religions – methods supported by a certain section of our press; and on the other to the unreasoning zeal of certain Roman Catholic Bishops.[1] During the revolutionary outbreaks of 1905–6 our administrative incompetence and the anti-Russian agitation, promoted by some of the highest members of the Polish hierarchy, reached their climax. Government prosecutions were undertaken in several cases – always an undesirable method of dealing with the clergy.

Owing to the interference of the Austro-Hungarian Government, the Conclave of 1903 set aside the candidature of Cardinal Rampolla, which otherwise would have been successful, and raised Cardinal Sarto to the Papal Throne, under the title of Pius X. When he assumed control of the Roman Catholic Church, the attitude of the Vatican underwent an abrupt change. Formerly a strong political centre, which had to be reckoned with by the Powers not in spiritual union with Rome, it now became, as one Roman prelate expressed it, a *parocchia* —a mere parish. Cardinal Rampolla and the late Pope's other trusted assistants were removed from office; or, if they remained in the Roman Congregations, they were deprived of all

[1] In this connection Monsignor Ropp, Bishop of Vilna, whose father was a German from the Baltic Provinces, and who was only a Pole on his mother's side, caused the Government particular trouble. In consequence of his descent, the Poles of his flock regarded him as a German, and the Lithuanians as a Pole. This created a most uncomfortable situation for him in his bishopric; he sought a way out by encouraging Polish national aspirations in a district where the Polish element was in a minority.

influence. Their places were taken by personages in no way trained to political activity, who owed their elevation chiefly to their close connection with the Society of Jesus, or with the ultramontane circles which it inspires.

The first result of this fundamental change was a speedy rupture of diplomatic relations between the Roman Curia and the Government of the French Republic. The flame of anti-clericalism which flares up periodically in France burned with especial brightness while the Combes Cabinet was in power. It brought to nought the long years of labour of the French Ambassador, Lefebvre de Béhaine, who had achieved a leading position among the foreign representatives at the Vatican. He had accomplished work of considerable service to France by relegating to the background the rival influences of German and Austro-Hungarian diplomacy; and he had restored to the French Government a part of that ascendency in the East which Louis XIV had enjoyed as the protector of Roman Catholic interest – a rôle that the Republic valued no less than did the old Monarchy. This new conflict between French Jacobinism and Roman Ultramontanism would not have become particularly acute under the rule of Leo XIII, nor would it have led to a diplomatic rupture; but the young and inexperienced Secretary of State who had succeeded Cardinal Rampolla was unequal to the difficult situation, and his tactical errors played into the hands of the French anti-clericals. Relations were severed, and the enemies of France had the satisfaction of seeing the place of her representative at the Vatican remain empty for many years. The French Government felt the disadvantages resulting from this situation, especially after the death of Pius X in 1914. At the very beginning of the Great War, Benedict XV della Chiesa was raised to the Papal Throne; and during the first years of his rule the policy of the Roman Curia was influenced by the enemies of France against her interests and those of her ally, Belgium.

The new orientation of Vatican policy, which aimed at a return to the spirit and traditions of the time of Pius IX, was scarcely compatible with modern conditions; while the rigid narrow-mindedness of our administration, which could not be induced to regard Russo-Polish relations from any angle but that of the revolutionary events of 1863, made relations

between the Papacy and the Russian Government very difficult. I was fully conscious of the uselessness of my presence in Rome; moreover I was anxious to obtain an appointment somewhere in the Near or the Far East, where I might find more fruitful and interesting work, and where hitherto, despite all my efforts, it had not fallen to my lot to serve. Defining my desire in more precise terms, I applied for the post of Minister at either Bukarest or Pekin. M. Isvolsky turned a sympathetic ear to my request, but for reasons not under his control it remained unfulfilled.

This, then, was the state of affairs when M. Charikov was appointed Ambassador at Constantinople, and M. Isvolsky offered me the post of Under-Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs. The Minister's offer was couched in terms which made it difficult to refuse, and not without some hesitation I accepted it. Speaking candidly, my chief motive in accepting this post, which offered few attractions, was the intense homesickness which I suddenly felt, and my weariness after twenty years abroad. I longed either to experience something entirely new or else simply to return to my homeland. Moscow, where I spent my childhood and early youth, has always been the centre of our national life, and it left a profound impression upon me. Among these early influences which moulded my character there was no abnormal or exaggerated idea of patriotic fetishism, or contempt for forms of culture foreign to me as a Russian. I was brought up in the conviction that the only admissible type of nationalism is one that does not conflict with the fundamental principles of Christian ethics; for Christianity alone is capable of forging a link between the different forms of national culture, and creating a feeling of mutual understanding and brotherhood among peoples of the most varied civilizations.

This point of view was quite compatible with my lifelong devotion to the ways and customs of my country – a devotion which twenty years of exile had increased rather than diminished. Consequently, although I was under no illusions as to the difficulties of the work awaiting me in St. Petersburg, I nevertheless accepted my transfer to Russia with a feeling of lively satisfaction. The fact that my wife shared this feeling, perhaps to an even greater degree, simplified my position considerably.

I arrived in St. Petersburg early in June, 1909, and found M. Isvolsky in a very depressed state of mind. A nervous and self-centred man, he still smarted under a sense of failure in his negotiations with the Austro-Hungarian Government with regard to the annexation of Bosnia and Herzegovina. The general negotiations between the Powers which followed that event took a turn very unfavourable to Slav interests and nearly caused a European war.

I do not propose in these memoirs to describe in detail events in which I myself took no part – I shall therefore only refer to them in so far as they contributed to the situation which I found to exist in Russia on my arrival, and subsequently influenced the course of my own work at the Ministry for Foreign Affairs. I was fairly well-informed as to the state of opinion in St. Petersburg; and owing to our former connection knew M. Isvolsky very intimately. I was not surprised, therefore, to find him in a state of great irritation at the faithlessness of the Austro-Hungarian Minister for Foreign Affairs, who was supported by Germany with the whole weight of her international influence. Mingled with this fully comprehensible and justifiable irritation was some dissatisfaction with himself, which perhaps he did not fully realize; but I detected the traces of it during our first meeting. This talented and, despite his cold exterior, kindly man had one weakness which most seriously complicated and embittered his own existence and that of all connected with him: he attributed everything which occurred, both in the realm of politics and in all private affairs relating, however remotely, to himself, to evil intentions and a desire to be unjust to him.

In view of this characteristic, it is not surprising that M. Isvolsky regarded the situation in the summer of 1909 in a sombre light. It was indeed complicated, and foreshadowed the most serious consequences. Aehrenthal's Balkan policy was now revealed for the first time with a clearness which left no room for doubt; we realized that he aimed at the complete subjection of Serbia to Austrian influence, in direct opposition to the letter and the spirit of international treaties, and to the prejudice of Russia's rightful interests in the Balkans.

Endeavours of this sort had long ago taken shape in connection with Viennese diplomacy, and manifested themselves in a

more or less definite manner at various times, often resulting in failure, but sometimes, as during the reign of Milan Obrenovich, bringing Austria-Hungary temporary success. From this political rivalry in the Balkans sprang a perpetual enmity between Vienna and St. Petersburg, fated to lead sooner or later to open war – the inevitable outcome of the irreconcilable antipathy. It was always improbable, on account of the general European character which Balkan questions had long since assumed, that Russia and Austria-Hungary would be able to settle accounts with regard to the Balkans without drawing the other Powers into the struggle; but when Bismarck concluded an alliance with Austria in 1879 there was no longer any hope of confining the matter to a mere duel between the two rivals. This was recognized by all the European Cabinets. Nevertheless, up to 1909 Germany refrained from openly avowing her full solidarity with Austria-Hungary's Balkan policy; and, despite the fundamental change in her own policy, she had ostensibly adhered to Bismarck's advice concerning 'the bones of a Pomeranian Grenadier.' The Bosnia and Herzegovina crisis in 1908–9 revealed the true state of affairs to the whole of Europe. Aehrenthal's unscrupulous conduct in converting the actual control of Bosnia and Herzegovina, which entailed no danger for the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy, into a juridical possession by means of a gross infringement of all law, was a challenge to the whole Serbian people and also to Russia; not only did it fail to evoke any expression of disapproval from the German Government – it actually received the support and protection of Germany's Imperial power. Europe was confronted with a *fait accompli*, and was forced either to accept it as such, or to engage in an armed struggle with Austria-Hungary, and possibly with the whole of the Triple Alliance.

The public opinion of Europe condemned the methods of Austrian diplomacy, recognizing in them a threat to the legal stability of international State life; but no one was eager to oppose them by force of arms. The direct interests of Western Europe were not affected by the Austrian *coup*, and the danger of provoking a European war, with its disastrous consequences, was apparent to all. Consequently neither France nor England could be expected to concern themselves with

this question, beyond according their diplomatic support to the wronged party.

In Serbia and Russia, however, the Bosnia-Herzegovina crisis called forth very different feelings. For Serbia the absorption by Austria-Hungary of a considerable portion of the Serbian race was not only a heavy blow to her national pride, it was also an ominous forecast of the ulterior designs of the Viennese policy. Russia, although her interests were not directly affected, nevertheless felt insulted by the methods adopted by Count Aehrenthal in dealing with the Russian Minister for Foreign Affairs. By means of a palpable concealment he allowed himself to interpret certain general conversations between himself and Isvolsky as a consent on the part of the Russian Government to the immediate annexation of the occupied Turkish provinces. In the course of these conversations, which took place in Count Berchtold's house in Moravia, Isvolsky demanded appropriate compensation for Russia, should Austria-Hungary succeed in carrying out her aims.

There is no doubt that Isvolsky made a great mistake in reposing so much confidence in a diplomat whose character demanded special caution in all business dealings; indeed he had the courage to confess it. Aehrenthal's astonishing lack of conscience was only equalled by that of his trusted assistants, and the fact that none of them had the slightest hesitation in using deceit was abundantly demonstrated soon afterwards. But the harm was already done, and its consequences were soon apparent. I do not wish to imply that these consequences, which nearly led to a war between Austria and Serbia, in which Russia could not have remained neutral, would not still have occurred even if Isvolsky had employed the utmost circumspection in dealing with Viennese diplomacy. Aehrenthal, an unusually boastful man, was anxious to score an outstanding success, both for his personal credit, and in order to strengthen the position of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy, which became more precarious with each succeeding year. It had long been understood in Vienna that the awakening of national self-consciousness among the Slavonic subjects of the Hapsburg Empire, due to the emancipatory policy pursued by Russia in the Balkan Peninsula, must ultimately bring Austria-Hungary to ruin. During the long reign of the

Emperor Francis Joseph the administrative organization of the Dual Monarchy had, by reason of its injustice, depending for its existence upon the oppression of the majority by a tyrannous minority in both Austria and Hungary, began to show indubitable signs of internal dissolution. Young Italy, rich in her youthful vigour, gave the first impetus to the dismemberment of the Austrian Empire; and although she did not achieve her aim of uniting all the Italian territories included in the decrepit Hapsburg Monarchy, this very fact constituted a standing menace to Austria, in spite of the formal alliance between the two countries. Austria-Hungary had another neighbour – Serbia: a still younger people, fated to attain to political freedom after ages of burdensome slavery. Up to the time of the last Balkan War the outstanding qualities of the Serbs had failed to obtain due recognition, not only from the Western European Powers, who were but little interested in them, but also from Russian public opinion. But they became an object of intense enmity and suspicion to the Austro-Hungarian Government from the moment when the Karageorgevich dynasty became established on the throne, and the period of political subservience which had prevailed during the reign of Milan passed away never to return. The Karageorgevich dynasty enjoyed the affection of the people, and all the Serbian hopes of national expansion were bound up with it. As the Hapsburg Monarchy tended towards decrepitude, and its internal creative powers declined, Serbia became an increasing danger. Too weak to renew the rusty machinery of State, and to base it on a broader foundation more in accordance with the spirit of the times, Austria-Hungary had no choice but to come into open conflict with Serbia, relying upon the crushing superiority of her military forces and the powerful support of her German ally. In this unequal struggle Viennese diplomacy displayed complete indifference as to what means it employed to injure its antagonist. One of the measures adopted, and one that was most bitterly resented, was, as has already been mentioned, the establishment of sovereign rights over a considerable portion of the Serbian people domiciled in the Turkish provinces, and placed under Austrian administration by the Berlin Treaty. The rights of Turkey in Bosnia and Herzegovina, although they continued to exist in theory, became a

mere fiction from the day when the Austrian military occupation began. The possibility of Turkish protests caused but little anxiety to Aehrenthal, who rightly judged that he would meet with no insuperable obstacles in setting them aside. Neither did Austria, in view of her military superiority, anticipate any counter-action on the part of Serbia; and she correctly calculated that the Western Powers would do nothing beyond making a diplomatic protest. There remained only Russia, to whom the brutal seizure of two Slavonic districts in the Balkan Peninsula constituted a direct challenge; it foreshadowed the possibility of further interference with the political equilibrium of the Balkans, in a manner injurious to Russian interests. In order to paralyse any active opposition on the part of Russia, it was necessary to have recourse to extreme measures; and Aehrenthal, not relying upon his own strength, sought the aid of his ally Germany. Assistance was accorded him without stint. Discussing German policy during the Bosnia-Herzegovina crisis, Prince Bülow, in his book, *German Policy*, remarks that 'Neither in his speeches in the Reichstag, nor in his instructions to the German representatives abroad, did he leave it in any way open to doubt that Germany had decided to remain faithful to her alliance with Austria-Hungary under all circumstances and with all due resolution. The sword of Germany was thrown into the scale of the European decision, indirectly on behalf of her ally, Austria-Hungary, and directly in order to preserve the peace of Europe, but mainly for the sake of the honour of Germany and the maintenance of her world power.' Thus did the most keen-witted German since Bismarck interpret his obligations to an ally, to his own country, and to the preservation of European peace.

There is no reason to be surprised that the Pan-German publicists went further in this direction than the leaders of German policy. Thus in a pamphlet which appeared simultaneously with Prince Bülow's book, one of them writes as follows: 'It was a fact of exceptional importance that the annexation of Bosnia and Herzegovina gave rise to a threatening international campaign, directed not only against Austria-Hungary, but also against Germany. This campaign rendered the relations between the Allies absolutely indissoluble.'

Thus spoke the Imperial Chancellor in the Reichstag; thus wrote the German publicists; and, following their lead, thus thought the obedient German people.

'The sword of Germany thrown into the scale of Europe's decision' quickly decided in favour of Austria-Hungary the political dilemma which had threatened an international conflict. Aehrenthal's immediate object was to obtain the assent of the Great Powers to an abrogation of the 25th clause of the Treaty of Berlin – defining the rights of Austria-Hungary in Bosnia and Herzegovina – by a simple exchange of notes. Russia and the Western Powers desired an international conference; but this, the only legal method, seemed too slow to Aehrenthal. It had also a further disadvantage in his eyes: it offered no sufficient guarantee for the success of his plans, in view of the opposition aroused in the European Cabinets by the policy of Vienna. He had also another object; he sought to obtain from the Belgrade Government, and in a manner galling to Serbian self-respect, an admission that the demand for territorial compensation which it made after the seizure of Bosnia and Herzegovina was in reality groundless. Thus Viennese policy displayed its contempt for the sanctity of treaty obligations, and its petty malice towards a neighbour whom Aehrenthal desired not only to weaken, but to humiliate – a desire characteristic of his unprincipled and short-sighted policy. Yet this policy called forth no protest from Prince Bülow, but rather earned his approval and his support. The Chancellor believed that it should be the object of German diplomacy to eliminate Russian opposition to Austria's Balkan plans; he therefore instructed the German Ambassador in St. Petersburg to inform M. Isvolsky verbally, but absolutely officially, that, should the Russian Government refuse its consent to the unconditional abrogation of Clause 25 of the Treaty of Berlin, Germany would have no alternative but to 'let events take their course unimpeded,' laying upon us the responsibility for the consequences. 'Thus,' observes Isvolsky, in a telegram which he sent to the Ambassadors in Paris and London on March 10/23, 1909, 'we were compelled to choose between an immediate decision on the annexation question, and an irruption of Austrian troops into Serbia.'

It is evident that such an announcement bears the character

of an ultimatum. The Russian Government was called upon to choose between two weighty decisions: to sacrifice Serbia, or to renounce its openly-expressed opinion as to the illegality of the Austrian seizure. It chose the latter course, at the price of its own self-respect. Prince Bülow and Count Aehrenthal gained a diplomatic victory over Russia and Serbia and, indirectly, over the Powers of Western Europe. Little did either of them suspect, at the time, that this victory would prove to be the first nail in the coffin of Austria-Hungary, and would contribute indirectly to the overthrow of Germany from her commanding position in Continental Europe.

As an illustration of the peculiar psychology of German statesmen, I may mention an incident which occurred in connection with my official relations with the German Ambassador in St. Petersburg, soon after I took up the duties of Under-Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs. Count Pourtalès expressed to me his astonishment at the excitement caused in Russian Government circles and Russian society by the part played by Germany in March, 1909. He said, with an air of profound conviction, that this excitement was quite incomprehensible to him, because he had never presented any demands which could be construed as an ultimatum to the Russian Government; Germany's action with regard to the annexation question was, as far as we were concerned, entirely friendly. Noting my surprise, the Ambassador added that he was well aware that the responsibility for our anti-German attitude rested chiefly with the English Ambassador, Sir Arthur Nicholson, whom he accused of pouring oil on the flames, through jealousy of Germany. This statement calls for no comment, but it is all the more characteristic since it emanated from one of the least chauvinistic of German diplomats.

Great as was the sacrifice which the Russian Government made to preserve the peace of Europe, it was indispensable and therefore wise; and in spite of the painful position in which it placed him, Isvolsky took upon himself the whole burden of public censure. Less than five years had elapsed since the conclusion of our unsuccessful war with Japan, which caused those internal troubles which were the forerunners of the revolution of 1917. Our economic and financial position was still suffering from the strain of a war lasting eighteen months, and

our military forces were in an unsatisfactory condition. Our reverses on the battlefields of Manchuria had deprived our Higher Command of that self-confidence which is indispensable to success, and had weakened the military discipline of the lower ranks. With regard to material the army was in the same condition as at the conclusion of the war. In order to complete the picture of Russia's internal condition in the spring of 1909, it must be added that Stolypin, who accepted the power that was falling from the weak hands of Witte and Goremykin, had as yet barely succeeded in pacifying the widespread revolutionary passions, and in stemming the advancing wave of anarchy.

These facts serve to explain why Russia did not take up the challenge hurled at her by the Austro-German alliance. Although Serbia received no territorial compensation for her loss of prestige, her real interests did not, on this occasion, suffer through Austria-Hungary's predatory policy. Her territory remained untouched and her sovereign rights unaffected. There was consequently no alteration in the existing balance of power in the Balkans, such as would have threatened the vital interests of Russia, and compelled her to draw the sword in their defence. Serbia obeyed the friendly advice of Russia and the Western Powers, and prudently refrained from kindling a European conflagration under political circumstances unfavourable to her own future. The diplomatic incident was closed; but the bad seed sown by Aehrenthal bore poisonous fruit in the injured sense of national dignity of which the Serbs remained conscious.

I have already referred to the excessive self-esteem of M. Isvolsky; but at the time of which I write there was good cause for the display of such feeling, even by a man better balanced in this respect. The coldness towards himself which he noticed in society and the embittered attacks upon his policy which appeared daily in the press, caused him intense pain. His depression reacted harmfully on his remarkable capacity for work, and deprived him of the energy necessary to perform the heavy task which from day to day devolves upon the Foreign Minister of a Great Power. It became his one desire to leave St. Petersburg, and to exchange his thankless ministerial post for one less burdensome and responsible, as head of one of our

Embassies. He brought this desire to the knowledge of the Emperor soon after the Bosnia-Herzegovina crisis, and obtained his consent in principle. In order to give effect to this idea, however, it was necessary first to find a successor, and secondly to wait for a position as an Ambassador. All this demanded time. In considering those who might possibly replace him, he directed his attention to myself among others. Several people whose opinions he valued spoke to him of me. Besides, he had known me intimately ever since our three years' service together in Rome. It is of no interest to describe in detail how my appointment as Isvolsky's successor was effected. I will only say that, despite what Count Witte has said, M. Stolypin played no part in this affair. I only recall this fact because I deem it a duty to remove from the memory of this remarkable man the suggestion that he was influenced by family considerations in filling one of the most responsible posts in the Empire.

During my first interview with M. Isvolsky after my arrival in St. Petersburg, he told me that his departure had been decided upon generally, and that I was to be his successor. He requested me, therefore, to look upon the time I spent as his assistant as a preparation for the ministerial post. I expressed the sincere hope that this period might prove to be a long one, for I felt insufficiently prepared by my previous service for the task of directing Russia's foreign policy. In justice to Isvolsky I must say that he regarded our association as the means of completing my political training; and, from the moment I entered upon my duties, he drew me into his work in the most intimate fashion. He always demanded my presence when the chiefs of the political departments submitted their reports, and kept me fully informed as to the conversations which he held in person with the foreign representatives. Besides this collaboration with Isvolsky, I had, of course, to fulfil the usual duties of Under-Secretary of State; and the few hours which remained were devoted to acquainting myself with the more important political questions which had arisen during the preceding decade. Among these matters were our agreements with Great Britain and Japan, which constituted the foundation of our new relations with those two Powers. I mention them here because, when speaking of Isvolsky, one cannot pass over in silence the two chief events of his career as

Foreign Minister. These agreements, which are extremely important in themselves, are of special significance on account of their influence upon the course of world history after the Austro-German aggression of 1914.

Looking back on the two centuries of our relations with England, history presents an endless series of political misunderstandings, of mutual suspicions and secret and open hostility. During the whole of this long period there are only a few occasions when this hostility ceased, and gave place to ephemeral agreements based on a common conflict with a third Power which threatened the interests of both Russia and Great Britain. Regard for political expediency, to the commands of which the English are always obedient, accounts for these short intervals during which mistrust gave place to a calmer and more reasonable feeling of community of interests in many political and economic spheres. Looking back over this period of rivalry and enmity, which bore so much bitter fruit, I cannot escape from the conviction, formed during six years spent in England as a young man, that the mutual hostility of England and Russia is only the result of a lingering misunderstanding such as may arise between nations, no less than between private individuals. It always seemed to me that if there were two countries on earth foreordained by nature to peaceful co-operation, these were Russia and England. Their frontiers are nowhere co-terminous, and owing to the special nature of their respective fighting organizations – the one exclusively adapted for use on land, and the other chiefly naval – they can only attack one another with difficulty. Yet they were constantly quarrelling, and during a long period it never entered the head of either to investigate calmly the causes of this enmity, to ascertain whether there were sufficient grounds for it, or to make any attempt to set it aside. It seems probable that the chief cause of this mutual estrangement was not rivalry in the sphere of foreign policy, but the radical difference in the administrative organization of the two countries; the great majority of English people regarded our form of government with antipathy and mistrust.

The sole attempt at *rapprochement* worth recording was made by English diplomacy in 1906 on the personal initiative of King Edward VII. This attempt, which was cordially wel-

comed by the Russian Government, led, after sufficiently protracted negotiations, to the conclusion, in the following year, of the agreement referred to above. It did not touch European questions, but was exclusively concerned with the Central Asian interests of the contracting parties. There are no grounds for regarding this agreement as insufficient or unsatisfactory, on account of its limited character, for the misunderstandings between Russia and England proceeded chiefly from their relations in Central Asia. On the contrary, I am inclined to attribute great importance to it, not only because it instilled an element of peace into our age-long quarrel with Great Britain, but also because it was the first step towards normal and trustful relations between us in the wider sphere of general European politics. There is no doubt in my own mind that the agreement of 1907 removed many of the obstacles which might have prevented England from joining Russia in the struggle against Germany. By this I do not, of course, wish to imply that in the war which Russia and France waged against the Austro-German alliance, the help of England would not, under other circumstances, have been forthcoming; England had sufficient motives for her assistance without this incentive; but I am convinced that public opinion in England would not have been unanimous in our favour if the agreement of 1907 had not previously brought the two countries together.

When speaking of this agreement, it should be recalled that the idea of a political *rapprochement* between Russia and England was first mooted in 1904 by Delcassé, then French Minister for Foreign Affairs. It was felt to be the natural sequel to the *entente cordiale* between France and England which he had succeeded in establishing, in spite of its apparent impossibility; for it had been preceded by an endless series of misunderstandings, some of which had developed into acute controversies. I preserve the most pleasant recollections of this statesman of outstanding ability, and of my intimate co-operation with him. As French Ambassador to Russia, he rendered his country invaluable service. Even before his successful completion, despite considerable difficulties, of the *rapprochement* with England, Delcassé had effected a similar reconciliation with Italy, which drew the sting out of the Triple Alliance and facilitated Italy's timely withdrawal from it on the outbreak

of the European War. Delcassé's tentative efforts to bring about an understanding between England and Russia were sympathetically received by the British Government, and the French project was accorded King Edward's special approval and support. Delcassé's idea at once found a considerable number of supporters in Russia, including Count Lamsdorff, who was then Minister for Foreign Affairs; but the Emperor at first felt little confidence in the plan; and our conservative circles, which had not been cured of their pro-Germanism by the anti-Russian attitude of Germany at the Berlin Congress of 1878, opposed it. It was therefore some three years before the project entered the sphere of practical politics.

Delcassé's policy naturally earned him the implacable enmity of the German Government; Berlin decided that he must be removed from office at the earliest opportunity. An opening occurred while the Rouvier Government was in power in France, in connection with the diplomatic contest with Germany over the Moroccan question; and France was compelled to deprive herself, for a time, of the services of her gifted Foreign Minister, under circumstances damaging to her national self-esteem.

The most prominent Russians in favour of a *rapprochement* with England were M. Nelidov, our Ambassador in Paris, and M. Isvolsky, who was then our Minister in Denmark. When, after the fall of Witte, Isvolsky was installed at the Pevtchesky Bridge[1] as Count Lamsdorff's successor, he proceeded to give practical effect to the plan, which had then matured in the minds of Russian statesmen. As often happens in England, the Liberal Cabinet which had taken the place of the Conservative, continued the latter's policy, and Sir Edward Grey, completing the work begun by Lord Lansdowne, finally effected the Anglo-Russian understanding.

The agreement signed in 1907 opened a new era in our relations with our old and apparently irreconcilable rival. It found hostile critics in England, just as in Russia; some opposed it from ineradicable prejudice; others because they considered the agreement disadvantageous for their country. In England this obstructive attitude was chiefly found among the permanent staff of the Anglo-Indian Government, and in that

[1] The Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

group of British statesmen who always regarded enmity towards Russia as the beginning of political wisdom. At the head of the irreconcilables stood the late Lord Curzon, a former Viceroy of India, and latterly Minister for Foreign Affairs; his opposition was maintained to the end of his life.

Two months after I began my work as Under-Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, and when I was barely familiar with it, Isvolsky took three months' holiday, leaving me in charge of the Ministry. This was a rash step, in view of my inadequate preparation for the independent control of our foreign policy. Happily for me, these three months – my first experience of government – passed without any unusual occurrence, such as might, owing to my lack of experience, have had unfortunate consequences, not for myself alone. It was impossible to persuade Isvolsky to abandon the idea of going away. He was in permanent ill-health, and his nerves, for the reasons above referred to, were so unstrung that a prolonged rest was absolutely necessary. Opportunely for him, his departure on leave in the autumn of 1909 coincided with the visit of the Emperor Nicholas to the King of Italy at Racconigi, whither he had to accompany His Majesty. Subsequently, Isvolsky's absence was more than once repeated; so that during the year and a half I spent as his assistant, I was in charge of the Ministry for seven months altogether.

At this time began my regular and constant relations with the late Emperor Nicholas, which were only broken by my prolonged illness in 1911, and which lasted until my retirement in 1916.

CHAPTER II

In the autumn of 1910, our Ambassador in Paris, M. Nelidov, was taken seriously ill, and died some weeks later. His death afforded Alexander Petrovich Isvolsky the opportunity of freeing himself from his irksome position as Minister for Foreign Affairs, and of taking up the post of Ambassador to our ally France.

The Imperial family was at that time in Darmstadt, whither Isvolsky proceeded, in order to obtain official confirmation of his appointment to Paris, and of my appointment as his successor. On returning to St. Petersburg, M. Isvolsky informed me that the Emperor had ordered him to announce to me that it was his pleasure to appoint me Minister for Foreign Affairs. He instructed me to go to Darmstadt, in order to accompany His Majesty on his forthcoming journey to Potsdam, where he intended to return the visit paid him by Kaiser Wilhelm at the Castle of Wolfsgarten a short time before.

I arrived in Darmstadt at the end of October, and on the following day presented myself before the Emperor in the neighbouring Castle of Wolfsgarten. This suburban palace, whose dimensions and modest appurtenances suggested the dwelling of a country gentleman of moderate means, was at the time so overfilled with guests that the Emperor was only able to receive me in his bedchamber, where, besides the bed, there was scarcely room for a writing-table and two or three arm-chairs. The Emperor told me that he had fixed his choice upon me, because he had been able to become sufficiently acquainted with me during the fairly long periods in which I had been in charge of the Ministry; and because he hoped that during the time that I had spent in St. Petersburg I had succeeded in preparing myself for the performance of the ministerial duties. He then proceeded to discuss the matters which we knew would be referred to at Potsdam by the German Chancellor and the Secretary of State in the course of their diplomatic conversations with me. The Emperor added, 'I do not know whether the Emperor Wilhelm will talk to you on business matters. Very possibly he will only endeavour to make upon you the impression which he likes to produce at his first meeting with those whom he does not know.'

Next evening I took my place in the Imperial train at Darmstadt; and on the following morning we arrived at Potsdam, where the Emperor was accorded a solemn reception. During our three days' stay at Potsdam, I was received by the Emperor Wilhelm in private audience for more than an hour. During this conversation he only discussed politics in a general way; but he more than once mentioned Isvolsky in a rather tactless manner, giving me to understand that the German Government could not establish confidential relations with a Minister who served foreign interests at least as much as those of his own country. By these words the Kaiser wished to indicate his dissatisfaction with my predecessor, on account of his unfaltering fidelity to our alliance with France, and probably also because of the agreement with England which Isvolsky had recently signed, and to which the Kaiser could by no means reconcile himself; for the artificial maintenance of bad relations between Russia and England was always one of the principal objects of Hohenzollern policy. He then passed on to the inexhaustible theme of the age-long friendship between the reigning houses of Russia and Prussia, and the necessity of maintaining that friendship in the future for the welfare of both countries. With this I fully agreed; and I told him that, while remaining true to the fundamental principles of Russian foreign policy, it would be my first task to make every effort to re-establish the mutual confidence between us which had been disturbed by the Bosnia-Herzegovina crisis. After some dissertations on general subjects, the Kaiser dismissed me with an expression of his satisfaction at having at last met a Russian Foreign Minister who thought and felt as a Russian. 'With a nationally minded Minister,' added the Emperor, 'it will not be difficult for us Germans to live in peace and agreement.'

How strange it seemed to recall these words during those fateful days when this same Wilhelm, rejecting all the efforts for peace of the late Emperor and of Russian diplomacy, decided upon a 'fresh and joyful war' which, in his ardent imagination, should settle accounts once and for all with France and Russia, and at the same time with the Slavdom so hateful to him and his people, upon whose smoking ruins the world supremacy of Germany would be established!

The officially arranged holiday atmosphere of Potsdam was little adapted to business negotiations; these were consequently transferred next day to Berlin, where they were conducted both with the Chancellor, Bethmann-Hollweg, and with the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, Kiderlen-Waechter. Negotiations with the former referred mainly to general principles; but with Kiderlen-Waechter they were of a definitely business nature and matters under review were discussed in great detail.

At our first meeting the Chancellor made a favourable impression upon me. He appeared to me to be an honest and upright man, although ill-informed on questions of foreign policy. I attributed his ignorance to the recency of his appointment to the highest post in the Empire after long years devoted to administrative work. A close acquaintance with the internal conditions and the complicated political organization of the German Empire was hardly a sufficient qualification for the post of Chancellor: a knowledge of the many-sided and constantly changing details of international relationships was equally, if not more, important. At the time when I first became acquainted with Bethmann-Hollweg, he possessed no such knowledge, and made no secret of his ignorance. In discussing questions of foreign policy he avoided all technical details and approached everything from the point of view of plain common sense, an attitude which favourably impressed those with whom he conversed.

Despite his great stature he did not give the impression of a strong man; but the artlessness of his conversation and his sympathetic exterior produced an illusion of great sincerity and simplicity, and invited confidence. Such were my first impressions; but closer acquaintance did not confirm them. They only proved true with regard to his ignorance of foreign policy – an ignorance which, as events showed, he never succeeded in overcoming to the very end of his political career. This explains the fact that he never obtained actual control over German policy. As far as his uprightness and sincerity are concerned, I had occasion to discover his lack of these qualities some time before the fierce light of the world war revealed the double-faced nature of German diplomacy.

Kiderlen-Waechter, Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs

and the Chancellor's most intimate assistant, in no way resembled his chief. It would be difficult to imagine a man of less attractive exterior. The more he endeavoured to display gentleness and amiability in his manner, the more his innate roughness revealed itself beneath these external forms. But for all that he was indisputably a man of ability, closely acquainted with all the details of the international situation, and not afraid to express his political opinions openly. He was the friend and close collaborator of the celebrated Holstein, who for many years had exercised an unseen but powerful influence on the course of German policy. This collaboration left its mark upon all Waechter's political activities, in a tendency to carry on the Bismarck tradition. He was not loved at the court; the Empress, in particular, disliked him, on account of his tasteless and not always seemly jokes; but in his own place at the Ministry he was complete master, and his subordination to the Chancellor was apparent rather than real. He exercised a beneficial influence upon the course of German policy on several occasions, when he managed to avert apparently inevitable conflicts, for instance during the critical moments of the Franco-German negotiations on the Moroccan question. His chief merit in my eyes was his lack of sympathy with Austria-Hungary; like Bismarck, he regarded the alliance between Germany and the Dual Monarchy, not as an end, but as a means of furthering German aims. For this reason his death was not a matter of indifference to those anxious to preserve European peace; for his successor, Herr von Jagow, while he had none of Kiderlen-Waechter's defects, possessed none of his good qualities.

Immediately after my appointment as Under-Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, I became convinced that at the first convenient opportunity the German Government would open conversations with us on Central Asian questions, and would spare no efforts to obtain favourable economic concessions from us. Our agreement with England had led to the division of Persia into two spheres of influence, corresponding with their proximity to our respective frontiers. Each party to the agreement enjoyed special political rights in his own zone, while both had equal rights in a central zone, which was declared neutral.

This demarcation of political and economic spheres of influence greatly disturbed the German Government. It was constantly said in Berlin that Russia and England had seized the Persian market, and closed it to other Powers; this was true only with regard to transit via Caucasia; goods going by the caravan route from Asia Minor, or from ports on the Persian Gulf, enjoyed free entry into Persia. The construction of the Bagdad railway, by which Germany hoped both to obtain political influence in Asia Minor, and to establish supreme economic control in this region, was proceeding somewhat slowly. But the Germans were already anticipating the time when the line would reach places on the Persian frontier, and decided to prepare for that moment by negotiating in advance with the Russian Government. They wished to secure in good time openings for the economic penetration of Teheran and the richer and more populous provinces of Northern Persia, which were within the Russian sphere of influence. The old caravan route was useless for their purpose. It was necessary to construct branch railways, connecting the main Bagdad line with the capital of Persia and its chief markets.

From personal conversations with the German Ambassador in St. Petersburg, I knew before I went to Germany that this question would constitute the chief subject of my negotiations at Potsdam. At my first meeting with the German statesmen, I noticed that they attached the utmost importance to it, and would use every effort to obtain a favourable decision. The further course of our negotiations confirmed this belief. Kiderlen-Waechter, to whom the matter was entrusted, at once gave me to understand that Germany could not recognize the right of Russia and England to any economic privileges in Persia, based on an agreement between themselves and that country: Germany considered that this agreement, to which she was not a party, violated the principle of the open door and was injurious to her economic interests. He added that out of friendship for Russia, Germany was prepared to waive her right to obtain railway concessions in the Russian sphere of influence; but she expected, in return, that no opposition would be offered to the linking up of the Anatolian railways with the system of

lines which Russia contemplated constructing to connect Teheran with her Transcaucasian possessions.

This demand was both disagreeable and disadvantageous to us, for it threatened the trade monopoly which we had long ago established in North Persia. On the other hand, it was extremely difficult to dispute the legality of the demand, without imparting to our refusal a clearly unfriendly character; this would have been unfortunate, at a moment when Russia was endeavouring to lessen the tension of her relations with her Western neighbour.

My political inheritance as M. Isvolsky's successor was of an extremely varied nature. With regard to our ally France, our position rested upon the firm foundation of treaty relations which had lasted for fifteen years, and had proved their expediency and value as a guarantee of European peace. No undesirable complication threatened from England, with whom we had succeeded in establishing thoroughly satisfactory relations in 1907. Finally, our relations with Italy, which had long enjoyed our sincere sympathy, were equally satisfactory. After the Emperor's journey to Racconigi, where these relations assumed a definite form in the mutual recognition of Italy's political interests on the North African littoral, and of Russia's interests in the Near East, we felt we could count upon a further strengthening of our friendship, in spite of the fact that Italy was a member of a hostile combination. Thus our position in Western Europe could be considered fully secured. But immediately on our Western frontiers the position was very unsatisfactory, and it may be said without exaggeration that even before I became Foreign Minister, Russia's only enemies were her nearest neighbours. Ever since the time of the Crimean War, we could entertain no illusions on the subject of Austria's feelings toward us. On the day when she initiated her predatory policy in the Balkans, hoping thereby to prop up the tottering structure of her dominion, her relations with us became more and more unfriendly. We were able, however, to reconcile ourselves to this inconvenience, until it became clear that her Balkan policy had the sympathy of Germany, and received encouragement in Berlin. From 1908 onwards there was not the slightest doubt that Germany supported Austria's designs;

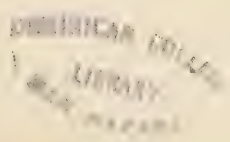
the danger of a collision between Austria and Russia was consequently increased tenfold.

I have already spoken of our complete lack of military preparedness when the Bosnia-Herzegovina crisis overtook us. This fact was well known in Berlin, and it serves to explain, to a great extent, the provocative action of the German Government. There can be no doubt that if we had been better prepared for war in 1909, Prince Bülow would have addressed us in a less defiant tone. Our unsatisfactory military organization was a chronic weakness, which invariably hampered us in the numerous wars in which we engaged; as the years passed, and our neighbours concentrated their efforts on improving their armaments, this weakness became an increasing danger. In the matter of military preparations Germany had for a long time past achieved astonishing results, and was in a state of 'constant readiness.' Even Austria-Hungary, although she had been on the verge of State bankruptcy for many years, surpassed us in armaments, and had developed her network of strategic railways to the utmost. In this direction our backwardness was especially noticeable. Immense sums, which could only be obtained abroad, were needed to remedy the deficiences of our railway communications. Our Allies did not refuse to lend us the money, but a long period of security was essential for our programme of reconstruction. Stolypin had convinced me of these facts before I went to St. Petersburg; and on my arrival there I was able to analyse the internal situation to some extent, and to arrive independently at the truth. He insisted again and again, during our private – and later during our official intercourse – on the imperative necessity of avoiding at all costs any occasion for European complications, at least until Russia had adequately developed her means of defence. It goes without saying that no one in Russia ever had any thought of aggression; such a course was never taken into consideration. I found this to be the attitude of the Emperor, who was by nature a profound lover of peace; he still retained painful recollections of the unfortunate war with Japan, in the possibility of which he refused to believe even on the eve of its outbreak. But the most pronounced opponent of any sort of policy of adventure was General Sukhomlinov, the

Minister for War, probably because the unsatisfactory condition of his Department was better known to him than to anyone else. Generally speaking, at the time when I joined the Russian Government there was no trace in St. Petersburg of the existence of any party which desired war; and the clanking of swords was nowhere heard. Although indignation with Austria-Hungary was deep and widespread, very few people took into account the fact that, without the encouragement, or at least the connivance of Germany, Aehrenthal's policy, which nearly led to war, would have been unthinkable.

It goes without saying that the peaceable current of opinion in St. Petersburg influenced the course of my negotiations in Berlin. It was essential for the Russian Government to placate German hostility for a long time to come, by means of all possible concessions in the economic sphere. As I said before, Germany was in a strong position, and it was difficult for us to maintain our ground with regard to an economic monopoly in North Persia. It was above all necessary to preserve untouched our political standing in Teheran, and to obtain Germany's official recognition of it; this could only be gained by granting her corresponding concessions. The chief difficulty in these negotiations was the fact that, owing to Germany's insistence in demanding the linking up of the Bagdad line with the Persian railway system, we were obliged to undertake this work ourselves, to avoid leaving it in German hands. This course represented the lesser of two evils; but it involved us in constructing a railway which was not only unnecessary, but actually harmful to our own interests. I fully realized that compliance with the German demand would be unfavourably received by public opinion in Russia, and would arouse great anxiety in commercial and industrial circles; nevertheless I decided to make the concessions in substance, but to accompany our consent with a series of conditions which would postpone their fulfilment for about ten years. I felt sure that by that time, we should have succeeded in attracting foreign capital to our scheme of railway construction; we should thus stave off the danger of Germany seizing and concentrating in her own hands the whole of the carrying trade in North-west Persia.

On entering into official negotiations with the German



Government, my first problem was to establish a *modus vivendi* between us which would constitute a starting point for more secure and neighbourly subsequent relations. This was imperative not only for our own security, but also for the sake of European peace; and in order to attain this end, I could not hesitate to make even somewhat heavy sacrifices.

When, about a year later, our agreement with Germany assumed its final form, it evoked, as might have been expected, fierce criticism in the press, and particularly in commercial and industrial circles. This was natural and inevitable, for immediate aims and interests close the eyes of public opinion to those which are more distant but often more important. One must reconcile oneself to this. Reports also reached me from abroad that our Allies and friends were somewhat disturbed by the Potsdam agreement. Our representatives in London and Paris reported that the English and French Governments were concerned lest unpleasant consequences might accrue to themselves as a result of our agreement with Germany. These fears related chiefly to the Bagdad railway, and to what seemed to them a new attitude towards it, on the part of the Russian Government. The English were also perturbed by the strategic threat of Germany's penetration of Persia. As a matter of fact, there was nothing new in Russia's attitude to the Bagdad railway; we merely gave Germany an undertaking that, so far as we were concerned, we would offer no obstruction to the completion of this line, on the understanding that the 'Bagdad railway' was the railway then under construction between Konia and Bagdad (although it was still far from reaching the latter terminus). Thus Russia did not consent to the construction of any new lines southwards from Bagdad towards the Persian Gulf, which might have injured the political and trade interests of Great Britain in regions where she regarded her interests as predominant, and where the English Government consequently regarded any foreign penetration with particular jealousy. We only promised not to hinder the carrying out of an undertaking whose completion, although we did not regard it with particular satisfaction, neither we nor our friends in Western Europe were any longer in a position to prevent. In a word, in her agreement with Germany, Russia

conceded no new privilege, but merely gave her sanction to what had long been a *fait accompli*. In these days the question has no longer any practical significance, but in its time it caused me not a little concern, and served as an occasion for numerous misunderstandings and attacks upon me, both in the Russian and the foreign press. I mention this circumstance in order to emphasize once more the fact that Russian diplomacy, in its sincere desire to set aside every occasion for disagreement and misunderstanding with Germany, and to establish good neighbourly relations with her, did not hesitate to make considerable sacrifices. Subsequent events showed how little these sacrifices were appreciated.

Soon after my return to St. Petersburg, a new agreement was concluded between the Russian and German Governments, referring, not to politics, but to the legal rights of private citizens. Some time before, a fairly acute demand had arisen for the regulation of questions connected with copyright, which Russian law only protected in the case of its own nationals. On account of the large amount of translated matter which found a steady sale in Russia, and of the demand, which had grown considerably during the past quarter of a century, for Russian literature abroad, this state of affairs was no longer tolerable. The attention of the Russian Government was first drawn to this matter by our Ally France, and an agreement was concluded which secured the copyrights of French subjects in Russia, and gave sufficient protection to Russian authors in France. One consequence of the Potsdam interview, which temporarily cleared the atmosphere of Russo-German relations, was that the German Government expressed a desire to effect a similar mutual agreement, to which we readily gave our consent. The German delegates came to St. Petersburg, and a Commission, of which I was president, quickly concluded its labours; the negotiations were conducted in an amicable manner and left a pleasant recollection in the minds of both parties.

At the end of the winter I fell seriously ill, and was obliged to go away to Davos for six months, after handing over the direction of the Ministry to my assistant, A. A. Neratov. Recognizing that I should be unable to concern myself with official affairs for a long time to come, I had preferred a

request to the Emperor to be relieved of my ministerial duties. But he refused to accept my resignation; and using expressions which showed his rare kindness of heart, he ordered me to concern myself only with my health, saying that he himself, with Neratov, would perform the work of the Ministry until I recovered.

By the autumn of 1911 I had recovered from my illness, and I took advantage of being in Switzerland to visit Paris, in order to establish personal relations with the statesmen of our French Ally. This was my first official appearance abroad since my appointment as Minister, for my journey to Potsdam with the Emperor a year previously took place before I was appointed, and I had accompanied him in the capacity of one only temporarily in charge of the Ministry. At Darmstadt, just before our departure for Potsdam, the Emperor had informed me of his will regarding my appointment as Minister, saying that he wished to appoint me at once, so as to give greater weight to my negotiations with the German Ministers. I requested him, however, to defer my appointment until my return to Russia, because I did not wish to make my début as a Minister on the Berlin stage. I considered it undesirable to connect my first official appearance abroad with a visit to the German court; for I was anxious not to convey a false impression to our Allies as to my political orientation. Moreover, I foresaw that my sincere efforts to bring about correct relations with the Germans would lead to my falling under suspicion, in Paris, of being a Germanophile. This apprehension proved to be well founded, and it took me some time to live down this incident in the eyes of our Allies and friends.

In view of the very general custom of judging men's methods on the basis of their inherent, or still more frequently of their supposed, opinions, tastes, sympathies or antipathies, I wish to explain in a few words my attitude towards the German people and their culture. I never suffered from even the mildest form of Germanophobia, possibly because there is a strain of German blood in my veins. But I attribute my immunity to this political malady chiefly to the fact that although I was brought up under the influence of purely Russian ideas, I was accustomed nevertheless to subordinate

them to the cultural principles common to all Christian peoples, which do not admit of preconceived antipathies, and still less of anything in the nature of racial hatred. Familiar since childhood with the German language, literature, and art, I learned to respect a people who had founded a science and an original culture which had not only penetrated the very centre of their national life, but had also made a valuable contribution to the intellectual heritage of all thinking people. German art, in some, if not all, of its manifestations – especially in the realms of music and poetry – inspired me with genuine admiration, although this feeling referred chiefly to a remote epoch. The cultural forms of contemporary Germany appeared to me much less attractive, for I disliked the elements of coarseness and lack of taste from which they were never entirely free. These defects became more pronounced with the passage of time, even invading music, which previously bore no trace of them. It is impossible to estimate, in a cursory survey, the causes of this phenomenon, but there is no doubt that it coincided with the period which saw the foundation of the German Empire with 'blood and iron' for its watchword, and marked Germany's entry upon the path of world politics – a path that finally led her and all Europe into the most appalling catastrophe ever recorded in history. As Germany moved along this path her art gradually expired, and even her science, which hitherto had never sought an end outside itself, began more and more to occupy a position subordinate to the State, until it finally assumed in many respects a character redolent of the barrack and the factory. The tree of German political and economic power grew, and threw its immense shadow over every quarter of the globe; but the source of the spiritual and moral strength of the German people began gradually to dry up. The beneficial influence which German culture had exercised on the peoples of Europe began to be lost; it finally gave place to a feeling of antipathy, when the ultimate aims of her world policy began to emerge. At the same time, however, the old German people's national virtues, their passionate patriotism, devotion to duty, and iron discipline, were not smothered. These sentiments, combined with a rare gift for organization, enabled the German people to hold out for more than four years in an unequal

struggle against a world coalition. It is impossible not to respect them for these qualities. But those who have witnessed and experienced all that has befallen our generation cannot feel love for Germany: it is enough if they do not hate her.

To return, however, to my first expedition to France at the end of November, 1911. After paying an official visit to M. Fallières, the President of the Republic, at Rambouillet, where he happened to be when I arrived in Paris, I had several official meetings with M. Caillaux, the President of the Council of Ministers, and with M. de Selves, the Minister for Foreign Affairs.

The French Government, and still more, French public opinion, were at this time troubled by Germany's efforts to obtain fresh concessions from France in respect of Morocco, as a counterpoise to the occupation of Fez by French troops. The unexpected dispatch of a German warship to Agadir was intended to further this aim, in addition to defending the very questionable interests of German subjects in this unimportant port. Herr Kiderlen-Waechter hoped to force the French Government to recognize German interests in Morocco, in order to acquire a means of obliging France to purchase those interests by the cession to Germany of a considerable area of French territory in Central Africa. The following extract from a report by Count Benckendorff, the Russian Ambassador in London, dated 6th/19th July, 1911, shows how the desire for colonial possessions was growing in Germany. In it the Ambassador passes on a communication made by Count Wolff-Metternich, the German Ambassador in London, to Sir Arthur Nicholson, the Under-Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, which runs as follows: 'Between 1866 and 1870 Germany developed into a Great Power, but during that time vanquished France, and England, divided the world between them, while Germany received only a few crumbs. The moment has now come for Germany to make known her definite demands.'

The Agadir incident produced an extremely acute situation between France and Germany, and at one time threatened to draw the European Powers into a general war. Russia took advantage of the noticeable improvement in her relations with

Germany which followed the Potsdam meetings, to exercise a pacificatory influence on the attitude of Berlin. Her object was furthered by the announcement made by English Ministers in the House of Commons, that it would be impossible for England to remain an inactive spectator, if Germany should strengthen her position on the Atlantic coast of Africa, where her appearance might threaten England's sea communications with South Africa.

After this intervention of two of the Powers constituting the Triple Entente, the diplomatic negotiations between the French and German Governments proceeded more quickly, and led, in October, 1911, to an agreement by which Germany recognized the special rights of France in Morocco, receiving in return a portion of the French possessions in Central Africa. Although, as usually happens, this accommodation was criticized in both countries, it was, under the circumstances, the best way out of a lengthy dispute, which had at times assumed the character of a serious international danger. In reality both sides had reason to be satisfied with the agreement; France, perhaps, more so than Germany, for by establishing her Protectorate over Morocco, she rounded off her possessions in North Africa by an exceedingly valuable acquisition, while the territory which she ceded in exchange, though of great extent, had up to that time been of small profit to her.

The Morocco Convention of 1911 saved the self-esteem of German diplomacy, but cannot be termed a success for it. Kiderlen-Waechter rendered great service to the cause of peace; for, when once convinced that the sympathies of Europe were on the side of France, he refused to strain the situation to the breaking-point; he thus postponed for three years the catastrophe brought about after his death by the criminal levity of Bethmann-Hollweg and his diplomatic associates.

When I arrived in Paris, the termination of the Moroccan crisis, which enabled France and all Europe to breathe more freely for a time, formed the leading subject of my conversations with President Fallières and M. Caillaux and M. de Selves. The French Government recognized the valuable assistance given by Russia in Berlin, and expressed gratitude to me for it. Impartiality obliges me to recognize, however,

that the deciding factor in the political crisis in 1911 was the firm announcement by the English Government of its solidarity with France. With regard to this I cannot refrain from expressing the opinion that if in 1914 Sir Edward Grey had, as I insistently requested him, made a timely and equally unambiguous announcement of the solidarity of Great Britain with France and Russia, he might have saved humanity from that terrible cataclysm, the consequences of which have endangered the very existence of European civilization.

I have already mentioned that my efforts to improve the relations between Russia and Germany at the meeting of the Emperors at Potsdam brought me under suspicion, in France and England, as a Germanophile. My first official visit to Paris afforded me the desired opportunity to remove this error from the minds of our Allies; and I hope that by my absolutely frank talks with the French Ministers I succeeded in convincing them of my real views with regard to world policy. My chief argument in this connection was the conviction which I expressed that it was absolutely essential for Russia, both in her own interests and in those of all Europe, to maintain the most satisfactory relations possible with Germany, and thus to co-operate in strengthening the peace of Europe. Moreover, the maintenance of the old friendship between the Russian and German reigning houses enabled us to influence the German Government in the direction of peace, to the advantage of France; and this we had succeeded in doing more than once at critical moments of friction between French and German diplomacy, in the period between 1875 and the Agadir incident.

M. Caillaux, the President of the Council of Ministers, impressed me as being a man gifted in a high degree with those particular qualities of mind of which the French seem to possess a monopoly. In a country where ability and brilliant keenness of wit are not the monopoly of the few but are widely disseminated among all classes, the head of the French Government seemed in this respect to stand out as an exceptional phenomenon. It may be regretted that owing to certain indiscretions which were attributed to him, there occurred an interruption in his political career, which has only quite recently been resumed.

After spending three days in Paris, I returned to St. Petersburg, spending the best part of a day in Berlin on the way, at the invitation of the Chancellor and Herr Kiderlen-Waechter, communicated through our Ambassador in Berlin.

Herr Bethmann-Hollweg and his assistant displayed intense interest in the impressions that I had received during my stay in France, and my conversations with her ruling men of affairs. In Berlin I found a mixed frame of mind: on the one hand satisfaction was expressed at the conclusion of the prolonged and difficult negotiations with the French Government on the Moroccan question – negotiations that had been more than once threatened with interruptions involving the risk of dangerous international complications at a moment inconvenient for Germany; on the other hand there were misgivings that Germany had been led into a disadvantageous arrangement, and had emerged from the situation with a success which was more apparent than real.

I was able to convince myself of the genuineness of this frame of mind from a conversation which I had with one of the Chancellor's young assistants, to whom it subsequently fell to play a somewhat prominent part in German diplomacy. He said to me, after dinner at the Chancellor's palace, that the October agreement had enriched Germany by an immense number of square miles of tropical marshes, in exchange for the acknowledgment of the exclusive rights of France over such a valuable country as Morocco. This note of dissatisfaction was also sounded in the independent organs of the German press; and also, our Ambassador informed me, in many society circles in the German capital.

Both the Chancellor and the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs repeatedly asked me whether I had not observed a revival of chauvinism in Paris after the conclusion of the Moroccan negotiations, and whether I had not seen an increase in the spirit of *revanche* with regard to Germany. I replied that if any such feelings existed in France, I had most decidedly seen no indications of them; they certainly did not appear in the course of my conversations with French statesmen, who knew how unwelcome to us were all such manifestations. Beyond this I was able to assure the Chancellor in all sincerity, that notwithstanding the heavy price which France

had paid for the agreement with Germany, there was no revival of chauvinism and still less of desire of *revanche* in the public opinion of that country. I deemed it my duty to add that, if by chauvinism they understood in Germany the painful susceptibility caused by the disseverance of Alsace-Lorraine, this feeling was alive in all the classes of the French people and there was no ground to expect that it would disappear in the near future. 'France,' I said, 'has forgotten nothing, and it would not be reasonable to expect her to forget the old injury. I am, however, perfectly sure that in no case will she deviate from the course of peaceful policy which she is pursuing at the present time: it is this course alone that saved her from political isolation in Europe and enabled her to find an ally in Russia and a trustworthy friend in England.'

I do not know if my frank explanations served to tranquillize the German Chancellor and his assistant, but they expressed their gratitude to me and promised to bring my words to the notice of the Emperor, who was, as usual, absent from Berlin.

CHAPTER III

In 1912 the Emperor Nicholas II held several political interviews on Russian territory. His first visitor was the Kaiser Wilhelm, who arrived at Baltic Port in his yacht *Hohenzollern.* The Emperor and Empress with their children repaired thither to meet him in the yacht *Standart.* The ceremonies were of a nautical character, as the only celebration in honour of the guest that took place on shore was the inspection of the Vilborg Infantry Regiment, of which the Kaiser was Colonel-in-Chief.

The German Emperor was accompanied by his Chancellor, Bethmann-Hollweg, and a numerous military retinue, to which Count Pourtalès, the German Ambassador, who had arrived from St. Petersburg, attached himself. On the Russian side the Tsar was accompanied by his customary suite, and by Kokovtzev, the President of the Council of Ministers, and myself.

Interviews between the Emperors took place on board both yachts. We also exchanged visits with the German Chancellor, to discuss political questions; Count Pourtalès was present at these conversations.

The visit of the Emperor Wilhelm to Baltic Port took place in June, 1912, at a time when peace reigned in international politics, and Europe was experiencing no alarming crises. St. Petersburg and Berlin were consequently in a tranquil state of mind, a circumstance which was reflected in our political conversations.

These were conducted in a peaceful and friendly tone, the chief subject of discussion being the general European situation. As is the rule on such occasion, a joint communiqué, edited by my diplomatic Chancellery, was issued to the Press. It stated that the meeting of the Emperors at Baltic Port had again confirmed the traditional friendship and family ties between the two reigning houses. It further stated that the Russian and German Governments, while each adhering to their inviolable principles, and remaining faithful to the alliances on which the policy of both Empires was grounded, adopted an identical attitude with regard to the maintenance of the peace and the political equilibrium of Europe. This was the first time that the maintenance of the balance of power in Europe had ever been mentioned in an official communiqué of

this kind. The expediency of this reference to it was recognized by the German statesmen at Baltic Port, although they only signed the text which I presented to them after some hesitation. After the events of 1909 it was impossible to remain satisfied with a few hackneyed phrases affirming traditional friendship. Public opinion in Russia would have received unfavourably an announcement consisting of expressions which had long since lost their original significance, and were devoid of all real meaning. As I expected, the communiqué signed at Baltic Port was well received by our Press. In France and England it produced an excellent impression, as the French and English Ambassadors informed me on my return from St. Petersburg.

The Emperors met at Baltic Port under conditions very different from those of our visit to Potsdam. They resided each on board his own yacht and passed from one vessel to the other to lunch and dine together and to discuss politics. These meetings moreover took place in confined apartments, which gave them a more intimate character. The conversations between the monarchs and those accompanying them assumed, therefore, a tone of greater freedom and simplicity. The Emperor Wilhelm, in particular, showed great gaiety and absence of constraint. Sitting almost opposite to him, I could not miss a single one of his jokes during the three days that he stayed at Baltic Port; and I must confess that not all of them were to my taste. The Tsar was very attentive to his guest, but his affability was of the kind peculiar to his reserved nature, and in no way resembled the noisy gaiety of Wilhelm II.

The Empress displayed nothing but weariness, as she always did on such occasions.

When, after the first dinner on board the *Standart*, the hosts and their guests went up on deck, the Emperor Wilhelm drew me aside, and entered into a conversation, lasting an hour and a half, which is clearly imprinted on my memory. He began by relating all the details of his youth, and of the peculiar family conditions surrounding it. He told me nothing that was not more or less known to me; but I could not help feeling greatly astonished, for I was at a loss to discover his motive in drawing for me in vivid colours a detailed picture of the hopes and vexations that marked the years spent by him beneath the

parental roof. With a frankness which produced a rather painful impression, he told me that his father, the Emperor Friedrich III, had never loved him: he had a presentiment that if he survived until the death of Wilhelm I and ascended the throne of Germany, it would not be for long; and that he would soon have to give place to his young son, for whom a long reign was probably in prospect. Friedrich III, while still Crown Prince, was almost an old man; and long before his death he was suffering from the malady which bore him to his grave three months after his accession. The mother of Wilhelm II, a daughter of Queen Victoria of England, and a woman who loved power, bore her son no love for the same reasons as her husband. According to the Kaiser, there were other causes of friction with his mother. From early childhood he had noticed irreconcilable differences between his mother's political opinions and his own – differences which, as he grew older, sometimes amounted to sharp disagreements. 'From my earliest recollection,' said the Emperor, 'I always felt and thought as a good German. My mother, even after thirty years in Germany, never ceased to regard herself as English. In her eyes German interests ought always and in everything to be subordinated to those of her native England, to which country she considered that Germany was called upon to play a subservient rôle. This lack of regard for Germany, whose military strength and cultural development had already given her a foremost place among the Great Powers of Europe, stirred me to the depths of my soul. The mutual estrangement between us increased with every passing year, and we were reconciled only a short time before her death.'

I reproduce this astonishing narrative at considerable length, not because I consider it interesting in itself, but because it seems to me characteristic of the impetuous and ill-balanced nature of the Emperor Wilhelm, who was prone to overstep the limits of that restraint and regard for their own dignity which we justly expect from those who stand, by birth, at the summit of the social pyramid.

After this lengthy introduction, which caused me some perplexity, the Emperor embarked on what was evidently to be the main theme of our conversation. This, it appeared, was the question of Russian policy in the Far East.

The first part of our conversation had been in the nature of a monologue by the Emperor, but the broader subject to which he now passed made it possible for me to interpolate my observations during his nervous and impetuous speech.

The Emperor began by saying that I must surely realize how warmly interested he was in our policy in the Far East, and how all our enterprises in that part of the world enjoyed his good wishes. 'You certainly remember,' he added, 'the help I extended to you during the long and perilous voyage of Admiral Rojdestwensky's fleet, by supplying your ships with coal on the high seas. Without this help they would never have reached Japanese waters. Your Allies the French never did for you a tenth part of what I did.' At this point I observed that the French Government had given instructions to their representatives in Madagascar and Indo-China to co-operate in every possible way to assist the voyage of our ships across the Indian Ocean; and that we had freely availed ourselves of their permission to shelter in French ports to await the arrival of laggard ships and to take in supplies. In this way France had rendered us a great service, all the more deserving of recognition because the prolonged stay of the Russian ships in French territorial waters furnished Japan with grounds for reproaching France with a breach of her obligations as a neutral. Passing by this observation of mine without attempting to refute it, the Emperor went on to appraise the general political situation in the Far East. He began by reminding me that he was the first to foresee the Yellow Peril which threatened Europe, and to endeavour, as far as it lay in his power, to direct the attention of the European Powers to it. 'And how did the Powers respond to my warning?' asked the Emperor. 'They made no answer, but regarded me as a lunatic. And what did England do? In 1902 she concluded an alliance with Japan which enabled that country to declare war on you and to emerge victorious. This great sin against the solidarity of the white races reacted not only upon Russia, but upon all European countries with interests in Asia. A new Great Power arose in the Far East, and the centre of gravity of this part of the world suddenly shifted towards Japan. For the rest,' added Wilhelm II, 'England, who is responsible for this, will not escape punishment The success of Japan in a

struggle with a great European Power has turned the heads of all Asiatic races, and above all affects the position of England in India. Europe must seriously reckon with the new situation which the short-sightedness of some and the egotism of others have created in the Far East. The Yellow Peril, far from ceasing to exist, has become more threatening, especially for Russia. What are you doing to obviate it?' asked the Emperor; and without waiting for a reply he continued: 'There remains but one course for you to pursue: you must undertake the building up of the military strength of China, in order to make her a bulwark against the Japanese onslaught. This is by no means difficult, in view of her unlimited resources in men and materials. Russia alone can assume this task, to which she is foreordained: in the first place she is more interested in its fulfilment than any other country; secondly, her geographical situation directly indicates it. If Russia does not take this matter in hand and carry it to a successful conclusion, Japan will herself undertake the re-organization of China; and Russia will lose irrevocably both her possessions in the Far East and her access to the Pacific Ocean.'

Although I could pass over some of the opinions expressed by the Kaiser, I could by no means agree with his conclusions – I asked him whether he remembered that Russia bordered upon China along a frontier of approximately 8,000 versts. Prudence alone would prevent her from attempting to establish a strong foreign force, which might easily be turned against herself, on this frontier, in a thinly populated region, and far from the centre of her military organization. To this one might add a still more weighty consideration, which did not support the Emperor's view: while we were occupied in establishing the military power of China – an unnecessary and even dangerous undertaking – we should inevitably divert our attention from the general political situation prevailing on our Western frontier, which for us, as a European Power, had a predominant significance. The Emperor ought to have known very well that Russia had no aggressive aims, and that her policy was imbued with a sincere love of peace. Although her problem in the West consisted solely in the protection of her frontiers, nevertheless the political situation in Europe was still far from having reached that degree of stability which

would admit of our regarding the possibility of conflicts between the European Powers as a remote contingency. Among such conflicts it was not difficult to envisage some which would touch our vital interests. Russia could not and ought not to let her attention stray, outside Europe, however important and widespread her civilizing mission on the Asiatic Continent might be. This was imperative, not only in her own interests, but in those of the whole of Europe, in which she constituted an essential and most important political and economic factor.[1]

In impressing upon the Emperor the primary importance of Russia's European interests, I added that the action he recommended with regard to China in order to avert the Japanese peril, would not only raise up a new danger on our very frontier but would inevitably bring us into a renewed armed conflict with Japan, who would regard our development of China's military strength as a threat to herself. The advantages of this risky policy appeared to me problematical, and I preferred the method of agreement with Japan, with whom it would not be difficult for us to come to an understanding on questions where our interests touched. We had already given this method a trial, with most satisfactory results.

With this our conversation ended. As I have said, it lasted a long time, and was conducted by the Emperor in a very animated tone.

Analysing the impressions which this interview left upon me, I arrived at the conclusion that the Emperor Wilhelm and his Government could not reconcile themselves to seeing Russian policy return to a healthy condition after the termination of our unfortunate enterprises in the Far East; these, while they continued, were encouraged by Berlin. We emerged from them in a sorry plight, but happily we had not been irrevocably engulfed in the Ear Eastern morass. If any meaning was to be attributed to the Emperor's words, it was plain that they could only amount to an attempt to turn Russia back to a policy which would entangle her once more in a prolonged and difficult struggle in the Far East – a struggle

[1] I never suspected in 1912 that the time would ever come when Russia would have to give up this rôle. The consequences to Europe, and the economic and political ruin which overtook her when deprived of her strong bulwark in the East, are apparent to every one.

called for by no real Russian interests – and would consequently deprive her, for a long time, of all influence in Europe. If one remembers that this conversation took place not more than two years before the beginning of the world war, this interpretation becomes still more convincing. By 1912 the German *Welt-Politik*, which owed its origin to Bismarck, and which found its theoretical and practical fulfilment in Bülow, had penetrated so deeply into the consciousness of every good German that it had become a sort of national dogma.

Thanks to an unprecedented campaign of Pan-German propaganda, some of the objects of German world policy were incompatible with the aims and endeavours of Russian policy. Russia's historical mission – the emancipation of the Christian peoples of the Balkan peninsula from the Turkish yoke – was almost fulfilled by the beginning of the twentieth century; its completion could be left to the efforts of the liberated peoples themselves; during the past century they had entered upon the path of independent political existence, and had demonstrated their capacity for conducting affairs of state. Although these young countries no longer needed the guardianship of Russia, they were not yet strong enough to dispense with her help in the event of any attempt upon their national existence by warlike Teutonism. Serbia in particular was exposed to this danger, having become the object of the decorously concealed covetousness of Austrian diplomacy. Up to a certain point Bulgaria was similarly exposed, for she lay on the route of German penetration towards the East; but neither the statesmen nor the people of Bulgaria were conscious of their danger, for a kind of hypnotism was exercised upon them by their Prince, who was a German (and at the same time an Austrian officer) and had been placed upon the throne of Bulgaria by the diplomatic efforts of Berlin and Vienna.

Although there were moments in the history of Russo-Bulgarian relations when mistakes in our policy gave our enemies an opportunity of accusing us of attempting to deprive the Bulgarian Government of its independence, and to establish something in the nature of a protectorate over Bulgaria, such accusations were not always sincere. It is permissible to think that, more often than not, our enemies pursued the definite aim of sowing the seeds of misunderstanding

and dissension between emancipator and emancipated with a view to their own advantage. Unfortunately the seeds of suspicion often fell upon good soil and brought forth abundantly. No one in any degree familiar with the aims of Russian policy can believe that Russia ever proposed to take any such action in the Balkans. Her sole and unchanging object was to see that those Balkan peoples who had been freed by her age-long efforts and sacrifices should not fall under the influence of Powers hostile to her, or become the obedient tools of their political intrigues. The ultimate aim of Russian policy was to obtain free access to the Mediterranean, and to be in a position to defend her Black Sea coasts against the constant threat of the irruption of hostile naval forces through the Bosphorus. If it is possible to talk in a general sense of the 'selfishness' of Russian policy in the Balkans, this 'selfishness' must be attributed to her efforts to obtain these guarantees for her economic development and for the safety of the more vulnerable part of her territory. In other words, Russia has always sought, and will always seek, whatever the nature of her state organization may be, an end similar to that which England pursued with characteristic undeviating energy during two centuries, and which she achieved during the nineteenth century – the capture and occupation of all the most important strategic points in the Mediterranean and the Persian Gulf lying on the route to her Indian possessions. Germany also achieved something of the kind, although to a much more modest extent, in the North Sea and the Western portion of the Baltic. We meet with a similar process in the Atlantic Ocean, where the United States of America brought the Panama Canal under their political and strategic control. The Canal connects two oceans, but does not border upon any portion of the United States, passing as it does through the territory of an independent State.

Russia proclaimed and defended the principle of the independence of the Balkan States as fundamentally just, in view of their inalienable right to an independent political existence. In our eyes this principle, in addition to its moral significance, had also a practical value; for not only was it not detrimental to any of Russia's vital interests, but it indirectly furthered their maintenance. 'The Balkan Peninsula for the Balkan peoples' was the formula which comprised the aspirations and

aims of Russian policy; it precluded the possibility of the political predominance, and still more of the sovereignty in the Balkans, of a foreign Power hostile to Balkan Slavdom and to Russia. The Bosnia-Herzegovina crisis revealed with unmistakable clearness the aims of Austro-German policy in the Balkans and laid the foundation for an inevitable conflict between Germanism and Slavism. The fact that their respective interests were irreconcilable was recognized by the numerous writers, both military and civil, in the Pan-German camp who preached the necessity for Germany's active preparation for the coming struggle. German diplomacy refrained from any open admission of its aggressive plans in Eastern Europe, but her representatives sometimes let slip expressions of opinion which, coming from persons bound as they were to professional secrecy, amounted practically to proof of Germany's complicity.

At the time of the meeting of the Emperors at Baltic Port the above estimate of the political relations between the Austro-German Alliance and Russia was generally accepted in ruling circles in Germany. There is no doubt that the Emperor Wilhelm, who was never distinguished for the independence of his political judgments, shared the attitude prevailing in his country. In endeavouring to persuade me to shift the centre of gravity of Russian policy from Europe to the Far East, he thought perhaps that he was giving us a proof of his friendship. We stood in his way in Europe; and therefore, in his opinion, the thing we could do was to get out of it, and remove ourselves as far as possible from those regions to which Germany's new world policy was attracting her.

On returning from Baltic Port to St. Petersburg, I availed myself of my first meeting with the Japanese Ambassador, Viscount Motono, with whom I was on friendly terms, to repeat to him the substance of the astonishing conversation with which the Emperor Wilhelm had honoured me. As Motono informed me subsequently, he telegraphed this conversation to Tokio. Soon afterwards the Japanese Ambassador was called home to take up the post of Minister for Foreign Affairs. I should not be surprised if the unfriendly words of Wilhelm II with regard to Japan exercised some influence upon the decision of the Japanese Government, as

to the attitude they should adopt, at the moment when Germany declared war on Russia and France in 1914.

In August, 1912, M. Poincaré, President of the French Council of Ministers and Minister for Foreign Affairs, arrived in St. Petersburg. There was nothing unusual in this visit, for the custom had already been established that the controllers of the foreign policy of allied states should visit each other from time to time for an exchange of ideas on current political matters.

At that time there was one question requiring particularly careful attention, which it could only receive in a personal consultation. This was the question of the Balkan Federation which had been formed during the winter of 1911–1912, if not at the instance of the Russian Government, at any rate with its knowledge and consent. The foundations of this drawing together of the Balkan peoples for the protection of their interests were laid in the early part of 1909, that is, at the time of the Bosnia-Herzegovina crisis, already referred to more than once, which caused so much bitterness of spirit to the Serbian people. The initiative in these negotiations was taken by Milovanovich, the Serbian Minister for Foreign Affairs, who went to Sofia for the purpose. Although at this time the entire attention of Ferdinand of Coburg and his Government was concentrated upon the question of the recognition of Bulgarian independence by the Powers, and upon the Young Turk revolution which had broken out in Constantinople, the Serbian proposal was not rejected by Sofia; and Malinov, then head of the Bulgarian Government, requested Milovanovich to undertake the further elaboration of the draft of a Serbo-Bulgarian agreement. Soon, however, a hitch occurred in the exchange of views between Belgrade and Sofia, which the Serbs attributed, not without good reason, to the disinclination of Ferdinand of Coburg to bring down upon himself the displeasure of the Austrian Government, by effecting a *rapprochement* with Serbia; for Aehrenthal continued to display his former vindictiveness towards Serbia, in spite of the diplomatic success which he had recently gained at her expense.

Every attempt made by the Balkan peoples to secure a closer understanding among themselves was bound, for the reasons stated above, to meet with the sympathy and support of Russian diplomacy. Our representatives in Belgrade and

Sofia were therefore instructed to support, within the limits of due caution, the Serbian proposal for a *rapprochement* with Bulgaria. The advantages of such an understanding were particularly evident in view of the fact that at this time there were signs of the conclusion of a military convention between Turkey and Rumania which would, if it materialized, constitute a serious threat to Bulgaria. After a long period of hesitation and wavering on the part of Ferdinand of Coburg, an agreement between Bulgaria and Serbia was signed on February 29, 1912, 'for the rendering of mutual assistance and the promotion of common interests in the event of any change in the *status quo* in the Balkans, or of an attack by a third party upon either of the parties to the agreement.' Our Ambassadors in Paris and London informed the French and English Governments of this in the above terms, with the request that strict secrecy should be observed with regard to the whole affair. The actual text of the Serbo-Bulgarian agreement was communicated to M. Poincaré six months later, at a personal interview which I had with him while he was staying in St. Petersburg. I was afraid to send it to Paris in full at an earlier date lest rumours concerning this secret agreement should leak through to the French Press; there had already been several instances of this sort of thing.

In discussing this diplomatic document with the French President of the Council of Ministers, some difference of opinion became apparent, the direct and probably unavoidable consequence of the different points of view from which we regarded the very fact of the conclusion of the Balkan Alliance. M. Poincaré saw in it, in the first place, the danger of a Balkan war, and therefore chiefly turned his attention to those aspects of the Alliance which made it desirable that we should repudiate it; there were not a few of these to which I could not close my eyes. But apart from these points we both found much in this alliance which aroused our sympathies, and caused us to acknowledge its great political significance.

I have already indicated the general characteristic of our Balkan policy. Its chief aim was, as I have said, to secure the free development of those Balkan nationalities whose right to independent political existence was recognized by Russia. There were, however, many obstacles in the way of the fulfil-

ment of this object. Above all, the co-ordinated efforts of German and Austro-Hungarian policy militated against it. Each of these Powers pursued its own aims in the struggle with the Slav element in the Balkans; they were united only by the necessity of destroying or removing a common enemy in one way or another. The policy of establishing the predominance of the Balkan nationalities in the Balkan Peninsula encountered not only these external impediments, but the quarrels caused by their own rivalries in Macedonia, which was still awaiting emancipation from the Turkish yoke, also acted as a drag. Consequently, the first serious attempt at an amicable delimitation of the respective spheres of interests of Serbs and Bulgars in this unruly region, which evidently, in view of the growing self-consciousness of the population of Macedonia, must inevitably in the more or less near future share the fate of Turkey's other possession in the Balkans, was of special significance because of its bearing on Russian policy. It was foolish to expect Russia to adopt a renunciatory or merely indifferent attitude towards such an attempt. To have done nothing to further the attainment of their aim by Serbia and Bulgaria, would have meant, for Russia, not only a renunciation of the fulfilment of her historic mission, but also a surrender, without resistance, to the enemies of the Slav nationalities, of a political position secured by age-long efforts.

Every time that Austro-German policy struck a blow at the Slav, it found its mark in Russia, who was standing guard over the interests of Slavdom as well as over her own interests in the Balkans. It was perfectly well understood in Vienna and Berlin that without Russia there would have been no Balkan question in the twentieth century, and that Serbia and Bulgaria would long since have ceased to exist as independent States. This conviction served as the starting-point for the policy which led to the world war of 1914, and subsequently to the irrevocable ruin of the Hapsburg Monarchy and the temporary shipwreck of Russian and German State power.

Be this as it may, the sympathetic attitude of the Russian Government towards the Balkan Alliance caused some alarm in governing circles in France. It seemed to M. Poincaré that this Alliance, in the form in which it was drawn up, would inevitably lead to a war in the Balkans, with all the possible

further consequences. We also believed in such a possibility; although we saw less danger of war in the conclusion of an alliance, even of an aggressive character, between Serbia and Bulgaria than in the fact that since the autumn of 1911 Turkey had been at war with Italy over the mastery of Tripoli and Cyrenaica. We were convinced that the Balkan States would not fail to take advantage of the difficulties created for Turkey by the fact that she was at war with one of the Great Powers; we foresaw that it would be extremely difficult to restrain them from settling accounts with Turkey at a moment so favourable for themselves. We had learned from M. Danev, when he came to Russia in 1911, what were the prevailing sentiments in Bulgaria, and these confirmed our conviction that complications in the Balkans were inevitable in the near future. We could only endeavour to lessen the acuteness of the situation by taking an active part in bringing about a *rapprochement* between the various Balkan States. We hoped that by showing a united front they might reduce the risks attendant on their inevitable and impending struggle with the Young Turks over the Balkan problem, and perhaps with Austria-Hungary also, in the event, always to be reckoned with, that the latter should attempt a fresh hostile move. Our participation in the conclusion of an alliance between Serbia and Bulgaria gave us the right to control the activities of these allies, and to veto any decisive step on their part which did not accord with Russian policy. Undoubtedly these guaranties were far from being sufficient, as was proved in the autumn of 1912; but it was found impossible to adopt others of a more effective nature, just as it was impossible for us to turn our backs on the Balkan Slavs at a critical moment in their existence, and renounce the obligation laid upon us by our political primogeniture, and by Russia's glorious past as the greatest of the Slavonic Powers.

The only question which caused some difference of opinion between our French guest and myself was that of the participation of Russia in the Serbo-Bulgarian Alliance (we had had no direct part in the extension of this alliance to include Greece and Montenegro). On all other questions we succeeded without difficulty in coming to satisfactory conclusions, although among them there was one of a somewhat delicate nature.

It referred to the personality of the French Ambassador to St. Petersburg, M. Georges Louis. This diplomat was by no means equal to the demands of his position, to the condition and peculiar features of which he entirely failed to adapt himself. His presence in St. Petersburg was therefore a hindrance to the friendly co-operation and mutual confidence which are indispensable between the Governments of allied States, particularly when they are dealing with antagonists who have attained complete agreement in the sphere of foreign policy. Fortunately M. Georges Louis was soon recalled, and replaced by the most outstanding political personage in France – Theophile Delcassé. His fellow-countrymen are now deploring his loss, although during his lifetime they failed to value his services at their proper worth. Without difficulty, and in a very short space of time, Delcassé attained the position in St. Petersburg that was due to him and acquired the warm sympathy and complete trust of Russian governing circles.

During M. Poincaré's visit to St. Petersburg, a naval convention between Russia and France was signed, which had been prepared in Paris a short time before by the Chief of our Naval General Staff and the French Admiralty. This document introduced no new factor into the relations of the allied parties, but served only to complete the Russo-French alliance and develop it to its logical conclusion.

In the person of M. Poincaré we recognized, with complete justification, a convinced adherent of the alliance between Russia and France. He, like ourselves, saw in it the one hopeful guarantee of European peace. M. Poincaré's upright character and unbending firmness of will made him, in our eyes, a particularly valuable ally; his love of peace and ardent patriotism were unquestionable. The Emperor Nicholas, who often prized in others those qualities which he did not himself possess, was chiefly impressed by the determination and strength of will of the French Prime Minister; these fundamental traits of his character, the more remarkable since they are seldom found to this degree in the French, who are by nature impressionable and changeable.

I saw M. Poincaré off, but parted from him for a short time only; for I contemplated going to Scotland in the middle of September at the invitation of King George, and intended to

spend a few days in Paris on the return journey. The situation in the Near East was such that a personal exchange of views with those who controlled the foreign policy of our Ally France, and of Great Britain, which was friendly to us, appeared to me very desirable. This would lighten our common labours in striving to avert those European complications which at this time seemed more than ever possible.

I arrived in London at the end of September, and in a day or two proceeded, in company with our Ambassador to England, Count Benckendorff, to Scotland, where King George was then staying with his family.

I spent six days at Balmoral Castle as the guest of the King, and preserve the pleasantest recollection of the friendly spirit of hospitality which the Royal Family displayed towards me. I feel that I owed this to the intimate relations which had so long existed between the late Tsar and his English relatives.

Sir Edward Grey, the British Minister for Foreign Affairs, who had come to Balmoral to meet me at the invitation of the King, arrived on the same day as myself; and Mr. Bonar Law, the leader of the Conservative Party – then in opposition – who subsequently became Prime Minister of Great Britain, arrived next day. By a wise custom established in England by an ancient parliamentary tradition, foreign policy is excluded from the political questions on which the Government and the Opposition adopt irreconcilable attitudes. Thanks to this custom the foreign policy of Great Britain during the last two centuries has maintained a continuity and steadfastness which other and younger parliamentary governments rarely succeed in establishing.

Our mornings at Balmoral were devoted to official discussion of political questions. There was no lack of these during the troubled autumn of 1912, and many of them demanded swift and decisive action by the two groups into which the Great Powers of Europe were divided. The impetuous outbursts of the Balkan States, impatient to give practical effect to the alliance recently concluded between them, and to take advantage of the internal and external difficulties of Turkey in order to settle their long-standing account with her, could only be suitably controlled by the combined efforts of the Triple Entente and the Triple Alliance. Both these groups were at

that time anxious to avert complications of every kind, for these might easily spread beyond the Balkans and develop into a European war. Austria-Hungary and Germany considered that the hour for this war had not yet come. Neither of them was yet sufficiently prepared, in either a military or a financial sense, and they therefore regarded the moment as unpropitious for a final settlement of accounts with their neighbours. The efforts of the Triple Entente in the interests of peace consequently encountered no opposition in either Berlin or Vienna, so that the war which broke out on the 8th of October began under circumstances which permitted the Powers to hope that it would remain localized.

While I was at Balmoral, the French Government submitted a proposal to the effect that the Great Powers should commission Russia and Austria-Hungary, as the two Powers most closely interested in Balkan affairs, to make serious representations in the various Balkan capitals, with the object of averting an armed conflict. I was able to accept this proposal without hesitation, for now as on previous occasions, the main danger of the situation lay far more in Vienna than in the Balkans. Only direct interference by the Austro-Hungarian Government in the Balkan War could frustrate the efforts of the Triple Entente Powers to localize it and turn it into a general European conflagration. It was above all absolutely necessary to prevent any such interference at all costs. While still at Balmoral, I instructed our Ambassador in Paris to set forth in detail to M. Poincaré our view on this matter, and as the result of Isvolsky's communication the proposal referred to above was made by the French Government. On my return from Scotland, I paid a visit to Count Mensdorff, the Austro-Hungarian Ambassador in London, to make him aware of the importance which we attached to co-operation with his Government at this critical moment. In doing so I pointed out to him that the abstention of Russia from intervention in the Balkan turmoil depended, in the eyes of the Russian Government, upon similar abstention on the part of Austria-Hungary.

M. Poincaré's proposal presented the additional advantage that it made it possible for us to maintain constant touch with Vienna with regard to current events in the Balkans without

ourselves taking the initiative. This circumstance placed some restraint upon the freedom of action of the Viennese Cabinet.

It struck me that people in England were inclined to exercise the greatest caution with regard to the Balkan questions in order to avoid anything which might be interpreted as a desire to bring pressure to bear upon Turkey.

During my stay at Balmoral the question of the somewhat complicated relations between Russia and England in respect of Persia was dealt with in its turn. Despite the sincere desire of the Russian Government to co-operate with the English, all sorts of misunderstandings were accumulating between us; we did not always succeed in bringing our views into agreement, especially with regard to the internal government of Persia, which was in a condition bordering upon anarchy detrimental to Russian interests. The British Government and public opinion in England saw the salvation of Persia in a representative form of government; they applied to her a standard but little adapted to the degree of civilization to which this Asiatic State had attained; its races were ethnographically diverse, and less than half of its population had not as yet advanced beyond the nomadic stage of existence.

As I have already had occasion to remark, the Russian Government set great store by the agreement arrived at not without difficulty in 1907, and was prepared to make certain sacrifices in order to preserve it intact, realizing that its political importance transcended the limits of the country to which it referred. Therefore the earnest efforts of England to introduce a parliamentary system in Persia did not meet with stubborn opposition from us, although we had no faith in the miraculous effects of such an experiment. It seemed to us at times that some of the British agents appointed to watch over the inauguration of the plan for remodelling the Persian political structure on the English pattern shared our scepticism; amongst them were men exceedingly well acquainted with the manners and customs of Asia in general and Persia in particular. Our chief difficulty was to bring the activities of our consular representatives into accord with those of their British colleagues, and with the new course of our policy in Persia. The scepticism of which we in St. Petersburg could not divest ourselves, was felt even more acutely by them. This

circumstance was probably the main cause of the numerous misunderstandings that arose between us and the English, of which the rulers in Teheran took advantage, in order to pursue their own aims in the masterly manner characteristic of so many Eastern races. But our misunderstandings with regard to Persian policy never amounted to disagreements sufficient to endanger the cordiality of our general political relations with England. This was guaranteed, in the first place, by the necessity, recognized by the Russian Government and by a considerable section of public opinion in Russia, of fully maintaining the Triple Entente as the only possible counterpoise to the aspirations of the Austro-German Alliance which were so dangerous to the peace of Europe; and further by the complete confidence and esteem which many of us instinctively – and I by reason of my personal acquaintance with him – entertained with regard to the high moral character of Sir Edward Grey, who was then in control of the foreign policy of Great Britain.

I speak here only of the *Austro-German* Alliance, because although the Triple Alliance was renewed from time to time more or less automatically as the periods of its duration successively expired, we did not doubt that it really only commanded the offensive strength of a dual alliance; we knew that the continuance of Italy in the alliance was chiefly significant as an insurance against the risks of a war with Austria-Hungary, which under other circumstances would have been inevitable. The paradoxical relationship of these two essentially irreconcilable allies, which was the weakest spot in the Bismarckian system of alliances, indirectly served the purposes of the Triple Entente.

In order finally to clear up some questions concerning Central Asia, which required to be settled, I stopped in London on my return from Scotland to meet Lord Crewe, who was then Secretary of State for India. This meeting strengthened my conviction that our sincere desire not to allow Persian affairs to become an apple of discord between Russia and England was shared by the British Government, and that therefore nothing threatened to disturb our peaceful existence side by side either in Asia or in Europe.

While I was at Balmoral, in the course of my conversations with the King and Sir Edward Grey, I touched upon one ques-

tion which, ever since 1909 – that is from the moment when the probability of war with Germany emerged from the misty distance into the realm of political possibilities – had begun to attract the attention of our Admiralty. Admiral Grigorovich, the head of this Department, was at this time actively engaged in organizing the defence of the Gulfs of Riga and Finland, which had long been in an unsatisfactory condition. With this object, a detailed plan for the naval defence of our Baltic Ports and of St. Petersburg was worked out by the Naval General Staff, under the direction of the Minister, and with the active assistance of Admiral Kolchak, who then held only staff officer's rank. This plan, excellently thought out, and skilfully executed, gave brilliant proofs of its expediency, and of the care with which it had been devised, during the first two years of the world war. It is well known that all the attempts of Germany to force a way into the Gulfs of Riga and Finland were a complete failure, in spite of the immense superiority of her naval forces. As a matter of fact Riga and, subsequently, the whole of the Baltic littoral were occupied by the German land forces when the resistance of our armies began to weaken, in consequence of the ever-increasing lack of military equipment.

The Emperor Nicholas displayed a lively interest in the work connected with the defence of the capital, and before I proceeded abroad he instructed me to try to ascertain in England to what extent we might hope for the help of the British Fleet, if it became a question of defending our combined interests against German aggression. To the question which I addressed to them on this point, the King and the English Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs replied that they could not give me any definite answer and still less take upon themselves any obligation in this respect. Nevertheless from a further exchange of views it became plain that if Great Britain and Russia were drawn into a war with Germany, the English Government would not refuse to co-operate with us on the sea as far as it was practicable to do so. In all probability this co-operation would be mainly limited to attracting the German naval forces towards England in the North Sea, as the British Fleet could scarcely succeed in breaking through into the Baltic, in order to join us in combined naval operations.

This reply satisfied me at the time, and many of us in

Russia had not expected more. Notwithstanding the dark cloud hanging over the Balkans in the autumn of 1912, no one could then foresee that the precautionary measures considered in common by the Governments of the Triple Entente for the preservation of European peace would, before the lapse of two years, assume a character of extreme and fateful urgency. At the moment it was useless and out of place to go into questions of that nature more deeply – indeed, it was calculated to defeat the object in view.

When I passed through London on my way to Paris the Turkish Ambassador, Tewfik Pasha, came to see me. During our interview I more than once drew his attention to the desirability of concluding peace between the Porte and Italy at the earliest possible moment; it might then be possible at least to postpone the war that was relentlessly approaching in the Balkans, even if it could not be altogether averted. If these results were attained, I should have the satisfaction of knowing that governing circles abroad would appreciate more justly the efforts of Russian diplomacy to end the war in Tripoli, by the agreed action of the Great Powers, before it led to the outbreak of a conflagration in the Balkan Peninsula.

I received belated expressions of regret with regard to this matter from various quarters; but the time for the course we had proposed was already past, and it only remained to consider what measure could best be adopted to smother the flames which were already blazing.

For some time before my journey to England, the policy of the British Cabinet with regard to the Mahometan world had been controlled by a desire to gain the goodwill of the latter, in order to enlist the support of the Mussulman population in India against the growing revolutionary activity of the local Hindu elements. This anxiety explains the indifference which we observed in England with regard to the fate of the Christians in Turkey – an indifference contrary to the political tradition of English Liberal Cabinets. This fact was also responsible for the vacillations of British policy in Persia and Central Asia. In addition to this fundamental consideration there was probably another of a subsidiary character: the desire on the part of the English not to weaken the position of the Turkish Government at whose head stood the Anglophile

Kiamil Pasha, and to prevent its replacement by a Young Turk Cabinet under Ferid Pasha, whose sympathies distinctly inclined towards Germany. These considerations explain the fact that England, despite her sincere desire to co-operate in the pacification of the Balkan Peninsula, more than once prevented the attainment of this object by refusing to participate in some diplomatic step directed to this end, for fear of producing an unfavourable impression in Constantinople. It became clear to me that we could not count upon the active assistance of England, should increased tension in the Balkans require the exercise of energetic pressure upon Turkey by the Great Powers.

My three days' stay in Paris' was chiefly devoted to efforts made in concert with M. Poincaré, to retard the course of the rapidly developing events in the Balkans. To this end we employed all the resources of diplomacy, beginning with persuasion, and ending with the threat that we should not recognize the new territorial situation which would result if the war ended favourably for the Balkan Allies. All our efforts proved vain. The Allies recognized that circumstances so favourable to themselves were unlikely soon to recur, and decided to take advantage of their political and military preparedness in order to make an end of Turkish rule in the Balkans. It hampered the natural growth of these young nations and had long ago become a monstrous anachronism.

The one possibility of preventing war lay in adopting the course which I had proposed to our friends during the Tripolitan War: to bring united and vigorous pressure to bear upon the Turkish Government, in order to induce it to enter, without loss of time, on the path of radical reforms in the Macedonian vilayets; but this course was precisely the one to which it was most difficult to persuade the Great Powers to agree, for each of them was pursuing its own particular aims in Constantinople. If none of them desired a war in the Balkans in 1912, with all the possible consequences which it threatened, Germany and Austria-Hungary feared it least, for reasons which I will mention later; but not one of the Powers except Russia and perhaps France, was willing to expose its interests in Turkey to even temporary risks, for the sake of preventing this war. Russia and France would have taken this course

only with the support of England; and this, as we have seen, was not to be expected.

The attitude of the French Government towards the Balkan crisis was fully defined from the very beginning. As I said above, M. Poincaré regarded it as the only possible source of European complications; and whatever his German opponents may afterwards have said as to his militarist attitude, he feared these complications more than anyone, and exerted all his strength to avoid them. The fate of the Balkan peoples, in itself, interested the French Government but little; it consequently did not adopt a benevolent attitude towards the Balkan Alliance. But although we regarded the matter from another point of view, we did not therefore feel justified in reproaching our Allies.

While I was in charge of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, it fell to my lot to pay three visits to France. I made it a rule when returning to Russia from those visits, to remain a day in Berlin as I passed through, in order to meet the men who were directing Germany's foreign policy. I considered these halts useful, because, although brief, they afforded me an opportunity of satisfying myself as to the political outlook of the German Government at the moment. Apart from the interest of such a verification, my meetings with the Chancellor and the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs were of some importance, because I was usually able to instil some measure of reassurance into German minds. Any manifestation of our friendship with our Ally France was always regarded with great suspicion by governing circles in Berlin, although on their side they made a point of emphasizing on every convenient occasion their solidarity with the Hapsburg Monarchy.

I knew that the German Government, despite its very real power, had suffered ever since Prince Bismarck's time from the delusion that it was persecuted, and was the constant object of hostile intentions on the part of its Western and Eastern neighbours. For this reason I esteemed it my duty, by means of a perfectly frank exchange of ideas on current political questions, to do all in my power to calm these morbid apprehensions.

On this occasion my fortnight's visit to England and my

subsequent stay in Paris provided abundant food for German suspicion. Therefore to stop in Berlin seemed to me particularly opportune, apart from the fact that it was important that I should satisfy myself how far Berlin was inclined to exercise a moderating influence upon the Viennese Government. The peace of Europe depended upon the course of action pursued by Austro-Hungarian diplomacy, and it was dangerous to entertain too great hopes of its reasonableness with regard to Balkan problems.

Fortunately, I was able to assure myself without difficulty, when I visited Berlin, that on this occasion there existed no such desire to demonstrate, in the face of Europe, the invincible strength of the Austro-German Alliance as had prevailed in March, 1909; on the contrary some uneasiness was felt lest this Alliance might draw Germany into undesired international complication, at a moment not chosen by herself.

I was able to note with satisfaction that the attitude of Berlin approximated to that which I found in Government circles in Paris. Like France, Germany was ready to do anything in her power to prevent a Balkan war; or if this proved impossible, at least not to allow Europe to be drawn into it. With this as a starting point, German diplomacy honestly welcomed M. Poincaré's proposal to commit to Russia and Austria-Hungary the task of voicing, in the Balkan capitals, the 'will to peace' of the Great Powers of Europe. In this connection I was told several times in Berlin that Germany announced in advance her readiness to join in all the steps that might be agreed upon by Russia and Austria.

I subsequently learned that a strong hope, if not a firm belief, existed then in Vienna, that a conflict between the Balkan Allies and Turkey would end in the complete defeat of the former. It was felt that the danger of Serbia's acquiring a stronger position in the Peninsula would thereby be averted for a long time to come, without any efforts on the part of the Viennese Cabinet. This belief doubtless influenced the attitude which I found to prevail in Berlin.

This hope proved unjustified; but it served to maintain in Vienna and also through the influence of Vienna, in Berlin, that moral balance which rendered possible the combined

efforts which all the Great Powers made in the autumn of 1912 to preserve mankind from the horrors of a European war.

At the beginning of this chapter I referred to the political meetings in which the Emperor Nicholas II took part during the year 1912. The third of these was the visit paid to the Tsar and the Tsaritza by the Swedish royal couple amidst the fiords of Finland, where, in accordance with a long-established custom, the Imperial family spent part of the summer.

The coming of the Swedish guests was not altogether without political significance, since the King was accompanied by his Minister for Foreign Affairs, Count Ehrensvärd; it had not, however, the serious political importance which meetings between the Tsar and the German Emperor inevitably possessed, despite the fact that they took place periodically, and on the pretext of close family relationship.

Up to 1914, firmly established neighbourly relations, unbroken by political misunderstandings or frontier disputes, existed between Russia and Sweden. Russia was animated by sincere good wishes towards her northern neighbour, and maintained active trade relations with her. Nevertheless, during the years immediately preceding the Great European War, symptoms appeared which indicated the growth in Swedish public opinion of a certain degree of alarm; this was due to the rumours, constantly published in the local press, of Russia's unfriendly intention towards Sweden. The cause of these rumours must probably be sought in the attempt of my predecessor, Isvolsky, to remove the restriction with reference to the Aaland Islands imposed by the Peace of Paris of 1856, which debarred Russia from erecting military works in this archipelago. It is the more to be regretted that this question was raised, since it was of no practical importance to us. In times of peace, permanent military works there were unnecessary; they were also politically undesirable, for in the eyes of the Swedes they would appear to constitute a threat to their capital, on account of its proximity to the archipelago. The experience of 1914 proved that in the event of any danger of war, the Islands could be rapidly put into a proper state of defence by means of mines, thus preventing the access of enemy forces to the Gulf of Bothnia. When I became Minister for Foreign Affairs, I immediately decided to discontinue all

negotiations regarding the Aaland Islands, in order to avoid undesirable misunderstandings with Sweden; the more so because I knew that Berlin was fostering the state of alarm aroused in Stockholm by the revival of the question of the Aaland Archipelago, after its long and sound slumber. I have already said that there was not the slightest foundation for this uneasiness; it was therefore important that we should do nothing to aggravate this state of mind in a neighbouring country with which we wished to live in peace and agreement.

The arrival in Russian waters of the Swedish King and Queen, who were met with great cordiality by the Emperor and Empress, afforded me the desired opportunity for doing all in my power to dispel from the minds of our Swedish guests any suspicion of the existence in Russia of unfriendly intentions towards Sweden.

As was to be foreseen, Count Ehrensvärd treated the Aaland Islands question as the chief subject of our conversations. At this time the Liberal Cabinet of M. Wallenberg was in power in Sweden. It showed no inclination to yield to German suggestions with regard to its foreign policy, but was more in sympathy with our French Allies and English friends. It goes without saying that the Swedish Minister for Foreign Affairs was animated by like tendencies, and I retain a pleasant recollection of my official conversations with him in the Pitkopas roadstead. Without accepting any fresh obligations with regard to one another, we were nevertheless able to arrange without difficulty that neither Russia nor Sweden would pursue political aims directed against the safety of the other, or enter into any agreement having such aims.

With regard to the Aaland Islands in particular, I was able to give the Swedish Foreign Minister an absolutely sincere assurance, in the name of the Russian Government, that Russia had no intention whatever of undertaking measures of any kind for converting these islands into an advanced base against Sweden. The whole of Russia's past friendly policy towards Sweden, which began with the Peace of Friedrichshamn, more than a hundred years ago, gave special value to the peaceful assurances of the Russian Government; and I could only hope that our Swedish guests would repose equal confidence in us.

CHAPTER IV

WARLIKE operations between the Balkan Allies and Turkey began with Montenegro's declaration of war against the Porte on October 8, 1912. This was the day of my arrival in Berlin on my return journey from London and Paris to St. Petersburg, which I reached on the 10th. Although the other parties to the alliance did not yet declare war against Turkey, mobilization proceeded with feverish haste in Bulgaria, Serbia and Greece, and everything pointed to an early armed conflict in Macedonia.

Before I left Paris I agreed with M. Poincaré upon the three following conditions to be laid down in the combined announcement to be made in the name of all the Great Powers in Belgrade, Sofia, Athens and Cettinje, by the Russian and Austro-Hungarian representatives acting as plenipotentiaries: (1) The Powers censure any action likely to lead to a breach of peace. (2) Basing themselves on Clause 23 of the Treaty of Berlin, the Powers, in the interest of the Christian population, will themselves carry out the introduction of administrative reforms in European Turkey, while maintaining inviolate the rights of the Sultan and the territorial unity of the Ottoman Empire. (3) If nevertheless war should break out between the Balkan States and the Porte, the Powers will not allow any alteration in the territorial status of Turkey in Europe at its conclusion.

These three points, which the Great Powers accepted without objections of any kind, embodied our attempt to avert at the last moment the impending war in the Balkans, with all its incalculable consequences. I had but little faith in the success of our efforts to maintain peace. The complete military unity which the Balkan Allies had achieved, filled them with a burning desire to measure their strength with their immemorial enemy, and to settle accounts finally with him for his age-long and merciless oppression. To restrain their outburst by promises of a renewed attempt on the part of the Powers to compel Turkey to carry out at last the reforms which she had so often promised and never performed, was extremely difficult, especially in view of the fact that the Powers themselves had, out of regard for their own special interests,

placed obstacles in the way of these reforms, sometimes openly and sometimes secretly. The die was cast, and it only remained for the friends of the Balkan nationalities to see that, if the war went unfavourably for these peoples, their bold attempt should not bring upon them too heavy consequences, and that the already insupportable lot of the Macedonian Christians should not be made still harder. In this respect the third of the conditions accepted by the Powers was to my mind the most important; for while giving satisfaction to Turkey, as the object of the aggressive policy of the Allies, it at the same time afforded a guarantee that the Balkan States, in the very possible event of their military defeat, would not be exposed to any risk of a diminution of their already sufficiently restricted territories.

In order further to ensure our Balkan friends against the dangers and risks attendant upon their attack on Turkey, on my return to Russia, I instructed our Ambassador in Paris to come to an agreement with the French Government with regard to combined intervention in the Balkan War by the Great Powers immediately after the first decisive battle, with a view to the earliest possible cessation of military operations. By this means I hoped, as I have said, to save the forces of the Allies from destruction, and to put an end to the state of extreme and dangerous tension which had prevailed in Russia and in Europe from the moment when it became plain that all the efforts of the Powers to delay the inevitable collision between the Balkan peoples and the Porte had failed. At the same time M. Isvolsky was instructed to inform M. Poincaré that the Imperial Government attached the greatest importance to its proposal; because, despite its firm intention not to allow itself to be drawn into a war, it would be very difficult for it to resist the demands of Russian public opinion, should the situation of the Balkan States become critical. France and England were undoubtedly interested in ensuring that Russia should not be forced to take part in the struggle; and the sooner the war came to an end, the easier it would be to prevent this. If it proved possible to stop the war before the resources of one or other of the adversaries were entirely exhausted, it would probably not prove difficult to find the means for settling the quarrel by a compromise acceptable to both sides.

My proposal was accepted in principle by all the Powers, disagreement being manifested only on the question of the moment for intervention. France proposed to summon an international conference immediately, to decide this point, but the other Powers, including Russia, advocated intervention only after the first serious battle had been fought.

Meanwhile military operations began, and developed with unusual rapidity. Towards the end of October the Turks were completely beaten in several battles by the Allied Forces. In less than a month these conquered the whole of Macedonia, and succeeded in penetrating far into Thrace, where they were faced by the fortified Chataldja lines which constituted the last bulwark of Constantinople against an enemy advancing by land.

The astounding successes of the Balkan Allies produced a stupefying impression throughout Europe, where both their friends and their enemies were inclined to overrate the strength of Turkey. The former were filled with joy, while the latter could not conceal their disillusionment, especially as they had counted upon the destruction of the Balkan Allies as a certainty, in making their political plans for the immediate future. Vienna was somewhat reconciled to the victories of the Bulgarians, because owing to the presence of Ferdinand of Coburg in Sofia, she hoped without much difficulty to devise means for obviating, or at least mitigating, the unpleasant consequences of the success of the Balkan Federation. But the triumph of the Serbian army, which had exhibited brilliant fighting qualities, fell upon Austria-Hungary like a bolt from the blue, and disarranged all the cards of Viennese diplomacy. According to information which I received from Berlin, there also the triumph of the Allies produced an unpleasant surprise. The German General Staff, which had long before undertaken the reorganization of the Turkish army, felt responsible, to a certain extent, for the catastrophe that had overtaken Turkey, revealing the unsatisfactory nature of the instructional work performed by von der Goltz Pasha and his German assistants. Berlin came to the conclusion that the work of reorganization carried out by the German General Staff in Constantinople had not produced the anticipated results; the matter must therefore be taken up with renewed energy and on fresh principles.

It may be said without fear of error that the plan for the complete subordination of the Turkish army to German control which was initiated in the autumn of 1913 by the dispatch of General Liman von Sanders to Constantinople – a political event of the first order – was drawn up as a direct result of the impression produced by the decisive success of the Allies in the first Balkan War.

However agreeable to us the victories of the Allies might be, from the point of view of our Balkan interests, the outcome of the war necessitated certain changes in the policy pursued by Russia up to the beginning of the military operations. The new distribution of power in the Balkans which followed the victorious advance of the Allied troops almost to the very walls of the Turkish capital, demanded from us, and from the other members of the Triple Entente, a new attitude and new measures. Russia no longer had to fear for the existence of her friends in the Balkans; but nevertheless she had to face extremely complicated problems, demanding untiring vigilance on her part; the active support of France and England which were almost as much interested as ourselves, was also necessary for a successful solution. While the issue of the armed struggle between the Balkan States and Turkey remained uncertain, the necessity of preventing this war from assuming European dimensions exhausted all the efforts of the Entente Governments; the victory of the Balkan States not only afforded no guarantee to this effect, but perhaps even increased the danger arising from the new situation in the Near East. It was clear to all that it would be impossible now to use the same language to the victors as was employed when their own strength and the hopeless weakness of their antagonist had not yet been exposed. It was necessary to find new formulas corresponding to the new situation. The events which had produced this situation can only be compared, in their immense influence on Balkan history, with the battle of Kossovo; this disastrous defeat was at last avenged, and the new state of affairs represented the first triumph of emancipated Balkan Christianity over its Mussulman oppressors.

The formula concerning the territorial *status quo*, which had presented certain advantages when it was accepted by the

Powers before the commencement of hostilities, had now to be abandoned. No one even in Vienna or Berlin could seriously think of enforcing it to preserve the inviolability of the Ottoman Empire. It was necessary to retain for Turkey only such portions of her Balkan territory as were indispensable to the defence of her capital. Macedonia, which the Allies had conquered, must be handed over to the victors, to divide as they pleased; and they must be allowed to profit by their victory to the greatest possible extent.

The untiring efforts of Russian diplomacy, and of the Governments friendly to Russia, were exerted to solve this problem which was fated during the next year to be the chief objective of the counter-efforts of our closely united political opponents, and to cause endless complications, and more than once to threaten the peace of Europe.

The Balkan Alliance, constituted with the good wishes of Russia, had brilliantly justified the hopes reposed in it. But it was still far from attaining the most valuable of all its objects from the Russian point of view: the strengthening of peace in the Balkans through the free national development of each member of the Alliance, with a mutual guarantee against unfriendly interference from without. The enslavers of the Christian peoples of the Balkan Peninsula were destroyed, and their power irretrievably shattered; but it was necessary to see that the new political existence of each of these peoples was allowed to develop on the ruins of Turkish rule in accordance with the principles of a just conception of its rights and interests. In aiming at this object, it was essential to bear in mind the fact that the enemies of Balkan Slavdom, embarrassed and angered by the unforeseen results of the war, would exert every effort to snatch from the conquerors the fruits of their victory. But as always, the most unsecure position was that of Serbia, over whom the threat of Austrian interference hung like the sword of Damocles. I have already mentioned the angry astonishment of the Viennese Government at the successes of the Serbian army against the Turks – an astonishment revealed in the conversation of its representatives abroad, and displayed with still less restraint in the opinion expressed by every organ of the Austro-Hungarian press, of whatever shade of political opinion. The successes of Serbia, however disagreeable in

themselves to Austria, did not as yet afford her the desired occasion for interference; but this was not long in presenting itself, in connection with the political consequences which naturally resulted from the Serbian victories.

As early as the end of October, I was informed by our Minister in Belgrade of the intentions of the Allies as to the division of their conquests among themselves. Judging by what the Minister communicated to me, there was reason to fear that Austro-Hungarian diplomacy would find more occasion than it required for interference in the aspirations of Serbia, which were directed towards the Albanian coast bordering upon the Adriatic. Cut off by the unfavourable course of history from the Adriatic, whose shores were peopled along a considerable stretch by her Dalmatian and Croatian kinsmen, Serbia had not ceased to strive for free access to the sea since the first moment of her emancipation from Turkish rule. This gravitation towards the Adriatic is explained by the atavism of the Southern Slavonic tribes which were historically connected with this sea, and also by economic causes. The Serbs wished to escape from the endless restrictions upon their freedom of export across the frontier, which Austria-Hungary imposed whenever Vienna or Budapest became dissatisfied with the direction of Serbian policy.

The successes of the Serbs, which surpassed their own expectations, were naturally bound to intensify their impulse to reach the sea; and their attention was directed in the first place towards the coast of Albania. This coast did not in itself offer many advantages; but it could be made to serve the purpose of Serbia, by securing for her that complete freedom of export which she would never obtain until she had emancipated herself once and for all from the constantly recurring frontier restrictions imposed by her neighbours. There was consequently no cause for astonishment when M. Hartvig, our Minister in Belgrade, wrote to inform me that among the demands drawn up by the Allied Governments was one for the partition of Albania between Serbia, Montenegro and Greece; Serbia intended to take as her share of the spoil the northern portion of Albania (excluding the Province of Scutari which was to be ceded to Montenegro) with the sea-coast from San Giovanni di Medua right up to Skumbia, leaving Southern Albania to

Greece. Hartvig wrote that the victorious Balkan States had decided to maintain these demands by force of arms.

It will be readily understood that Russia could offer no opposition to this partition of Albania among the Balkan States, in itself, owing to the fact that Russian interests were in no way concerned with the Adriatic littoral. Nevertheless, as soon as these demands were made known to me, it became my unpleasant duty to restrain the Serbian Government from being carried away by excessive zeal in pursuit of this enticing plan. I myself had no doubt that every encroachment by the Allies on Albanian territory would immediately call forth most determined opposition from Austria-Hungary and Italy, whose interests in that particular part of the Balkan Peninsula, unfortunately for Serbia, were identical.

Many political complications were to be foreseen in connection with the partition of Albania and the granting full possession of a port on the Adriatic to Serbia; but of the programme of the victorious Balkan States, including the design now manifested by Bulgaria, and especially by Ferdinand of Coburg – who contemplated placing upon his head the crown of Byzantium – on the Sea of Marmora and Constantinople caused less trouble and anxious labour. The question of allowing Serbia an opening on the Adriatic for a long time constituted the central problem of European policy, although in itself it was of purely local importance. The passionate attitude of Serbian public opinion on this matter was not slow in spreading to Russia. Certain circles in St. Peterburg connected with the Court, and the whole of the nationalist press of the capital, which had been hostile to the Foreign Ministry, carried on a noisy campaign against Russian foreign policy. This hostility found expression in street demonstrations, in meetings at which patriotic speeches were uttered demanding war for the defence of the interests of Slavdom, and in a regular torrent of newspaper articles which all but accused Russian diplomacy of high treason. The claims of King Nicholas of Montenegro to the town of Scutari and the adjoining territory evoked especially passionate feelings. Notwithstanding the undoubtedly Albanian character of the population of this locality, the Russian Government, had the decision rested with it, would never have opposed the satisfaction of the desire of

Russia's only friend;[1] on account of old memories Montenegro was enjoying great popularity among wide circles of Russian society – although this popularity was subsequently entirely lost. But the question was settled otherwise, and Scutari could have been allotted to Montenegro only at the price of a successful war with the Triple Alliance, which insisted upon the establishment of an undivided and independent Albania. Under these political conditions the Scutari question, which had a purely local and temporary significance, shrank to its true proportions; it would have been criminal to risk the life of a single Russian soldier on account of it. This fact has long been recognized in Russia; but at the time, the fallaciousness and artificiality of the Scutari question were overlooked by many people and the agitation to which it gave rise occasioned me not a few anxious moments. At one period this agitation assumed such proportions that its echoes penetrated into the Duma, where the parties of the Right showed a keen interest in the subject. In order to make the true state of affairs known to our popular representative body, I invited all the members of the Duma interested in our foreign policy to meet me, and read to them the original diplomatic documents referring to the Scutari affair. These documents so completely convinced them, that the hostile attitude which the Duma had manifested towards Russian policy was very soon changed into one of benevolent approval. I cannot here refrain from remarking that throughout my official career I never once had cause to regret entering into frank explanation with the Duma on questions of foreign policy. It did sometimes happen that the indiscretion of individual members divulged information which should have been kept secret; but no particular harm ever resulted from this. I think that untimely reserve and secrecy would in this instance and in many others have led to far more harmful consequences than any departure from red tape views of diplomatic secrecy.

I have referred above to the attitude of the St. Petersburg press towards Russian policy during the Balkan War – I consider it my duty to observe, in this connection, that in appreciating the political events of 1912 and 1913, the Moscow and the provincial press showed more political sense, knowledge and

[1] As the late Alexander III had once called the King of Montenegro.

reasonableness than the nationalist papers of the capital, which were subject to every fleeting influence. As usually happened in the case of foreign policy, the Liberal newspapers never lost their capacity for forming an unprejudiced and healthy estimate of the political situation; although they often did so with regard to home affairs.

I have already mentioned that at the beginning of the Balkan War, those in control of the foreign policy of the Powers forming the Triple Entente mooted the idea of calling an international conference to devise means for localizing the conflict, and to decide the numerous questions which would arise as military operations developed. The original proposal was somewhat modified: instead of summoning the unwieldy apparatus of an international conference, the Powers, at my suggestion, decided to set up a Conference of Ambassadors in one of the Western capitals. Paris was first designated for this purpose; but owing to personal considerations that are no longer of interest, the final choice fell upon London. It was decided to call in the representative of Rumania, as the Power most nearly interested in all the territorial changes which might arise in the Balkan Peninsula, to supply the Conference with information; but this invitation did not carry the right to vote.

In order to throw all possible light upon the forthcoming deliberations of the Great Powers, and to place these on a firm foundation, I proposed that the Powers should instruct their representatives in London to announce the formal renunciation by their Governments of any desire for territorial acquisitions in the Balkans.

It seemed to me that an announcement of their disinterestedness by all the participants was bound to exercise a favourable influence upon the result of the diplomatic intervention in the Balkan dispute. And in this case, as in all preceding Balkan questions, the attitude of Austria-Hungary would be an important factor in deciding the course of political events in Europe. Consequently the adherence of the Vienna Cabinet to the announcement which I proposed would at once throw some light upon the thickening fog which enveloped the international situation, and would give the Powers reason to hope that on this occasion no storm would blow up out of this

turbulent corner of Europe. On the other hand, a refusal by Austria to associate herself with the proposal made by the Russian Government, and accepted by all the others – with the exception of Germany, who declined to give a direct answer – would throw light on the true intentions of Austro-Hungarian diplomacy, and serve as a useful warning.

The reply of Count Berchtold, who had succeeded the deceased Count Aehrenthal as Austro-Hungarian Minister for Foreign Affairs, was not long in coming. The Vienna Government declined adherence to the announcement proposed by us, alleging that it feared to take a step which would not be approved by public opinion throughout the Dual Monarchy. Instead, Count Berchtold instructed the Austrian Ambassador in St. Petersburg to inform me that his Government had no thought of territorial acquisition, but would only endeavour to obtain economic advantages. From this answer, and especially from the supplementary explanations given by Count Thurn, it was possible to conclude that at that time Vienna had not worked out a definite political plan; and that, covering herself by the formula about 'economic advantages,' she left it to the course of events to decide her further line of action.

In this indefinite attitude Vienna was probably not a little encouraged by that of the German Government, which at the time manifested no desire to adopt a more active policy, in spite of the disillusionment caused it by the unexpected victory of the Balkan Allies over Turkey. Before the labours of the Council of Ambassadors in London began, there ceased to be any doubt that the central feature of the conference—the rock on which any attempt to reconcile the divergent views of the Triple Entente and the Triple Alliance could be wrecked —lay in the inseparable question of the establishment of an independent Albania and the grant to Serbia of access to the Adriatic. I describe these two questions as inseparable because Austria-Hungary and Italy, as a consequence of their paradoxical relations to one another, had agreed that it was essential to establish an independent Albanian State, however little political vitality such a State might possess; this would ensure that neither of these great Adriatic Powers would have to yield to the other a preponderant position on the Albanian coast. Such an accommodation as this offered no guarantee of

permanence, but as a temporary measure it had certain advantages; and the establishment of an independent Albania became a sort of dogma in both Vienna and Rome. The Berlin Cabinet promptly gave its adherence to this view, and thereby lent it still greater weight. The cession of any part of this littoral to a third Power was bound to destroy the political equilibrium in the Adriatic which had been established with so much trouble by Austria-Hungary and Italy. The ill-will of the Viennese Cabinet towards Serbia had increased in proportion to her military successes; and now the possibility of the appearance of that Power in San Giovanni di Medua or in Durazzo, created a similar hostility towards her in the other Powers of the Triple Alliance.

This circumstance, with which the Russian Government and its friends were bound to reckon, foredoomed to failure the eager efforts of the Serbian people to obtain access to the nearest sea-coast, and thus to ensure for themselves economic freedom from ill-disposed neighbours.

I have already said that the united sympathies of the Russian Government and people were on the side of Serbia. At the beginning of 1913, public sympathy with Serbian aspirations became so strong that it inspired in me a certain fear lest the Government should find itself unable to control the course of political events. In the society circles alluded to above, which were in close touch with certain Court and military centres, there was a rooted conviction that a favourable moment was approaching for settling with Austria-Hungary for the sins of the Aehrenthal policy. This attitude was the result of the intrigues of certain men, some of whom were hypnotized by personal ambitions, while others suffered from a false conception of patriotism, and a third party, the most numerous, acted from a sense of fundamental opposition to the Government, and in ignorance of the general political situation in Europe. As a matter of fact, if Russia had decided at this moment to do more than afford Serbia and her allies diplomatic support, she would have had to do this trusting in her own strength alone, at her own risk and on her own responsibility, as neither France nor England would have stood by her to defend foreign interests but little understood by them.

Sensible and responsible men estimated our position quite

correctly, although even in the Council of Ministers there were two or three who did not conceal their condemnation of the 'weak and anti-Slav policy' of the Minister for Foreign Affairs. Their efforts, however, led to no dangerous consequences for the State. The Emperor – and Russia should always be grateful to him for this – despite his heartfelt sympathy with the national aspirations of the Serbian people, displayed at this alarming moment a clearness of political thought and a strength of will which put an end to intrigues that would have forced us into a European war, under conditions most unfavourable for ourselves, for the sake of interests which did not justify heavy sacrifices on the part of the Russian people.

When I recall these already far-off events, it involuntarily comes to my mind that if, at the time of the Japanese War, the Emperor Nicholas had stood as resolutely for the defence of Russian State interests, and had not allowed himself to be misled by the intrigues of irresponsible seekers after profit and adventure, it is very probable that our country, he himself, and so many members of his house, would not have drunk of the sea of blood and tears which flowed from the Russian Revolution; and the history of humanity might not have recorded in its pages events which are unequalled for their sorrow, horror and shame.

It is possible that the recollection of the terrible lesson of the Japanese War was of service and inspired him with the steadfastness which he lacked in the fateful year 1903. The support which the Emperor extended to me never once weakened during the most critical days of the two Balkan Wars, and was officially crowned in the rescript issued in my name at the beginning of 1913, in which the Emperor expressed approval of my efforts to maintain peace. The Tsar's approval of my policy was expressed so unambiguously that it at once silenced the hostile chorus of my opponents and of the lovers of intrigue and scandal among the ranks of our self-styled patriots. I consider it a duty to mention here with gratitude the support invariably accorded to me during the Balkan crisis and at different times in the course of my official career, by the then President of the Council of Ministers, M. Kokovtzov. The removal from public life of this man, whose long experience as a servant of the State and innate inflexible caution, had endued

him with great wisdom, was felt very much by myself; and I had occasion more than once deeply to regret the substitution of M. Goremykin, an old man who had long ago lost not only his capacity for interesting himself in anything but his own peace and well-being, but also the power of taking into account the activities in progress around him.

Thanks to the Emperor's rescript, the work of Russian diplomacy in so far as it was affected by internal influences was greatly facilitated. For the rest, the external difficulties of our situation gradually increased, and accumulated to such an extent that I sometimes felt, that all my efforts to maintain peace were fated to be shattered against the blank wall of misunderstanding and ill-will erected by Austro-Hungarian diplomacy, over which hung the immense shadow of German State policy.

My problem was still further complicated by the fact that even in Serbia, in spite of the sincere and ardent solicitude felt for her by the Russian Government, I did not always find that self-control and sober estimate of the dangers of the moment which alone could avert a catastrophe. I recall this fact without any idea of reproaching the Serbian people, who had so recently freed themselves from the Turkish yoke, and who were now nearing the goal of their passionate hopes after an age-long struggle and severe sufferings. On the contrary, it was easy to understand their turbulent impatience when fresh obstacles, which threatened to deprive them of the success which they had so hardly attained, were suddenly interposed between them and the achievement of those aims which, to their young imagination, seemed so near to fulfilment. To my mind the Serbian attitude was partly accounted for by the fact that M. Hartvig, our Minister in Belgrade, preferred the agreeable rôle of countenancing the exaggerated attitude adopted by Government and social circles in Belgrade, to the less grateful one which he should have adopted in the true interests of Serbia: it was his first duty, as Russian representative, to sacrifice his personal popularity and restrain the Government and the people from dangerous impulses. Hartvig interpreted Russian policy in Belgrade according to his own taste, and thereby greatly added to my difficulties. At last, political tension throughout Europe reached such a pitch

that serious European complications in connection with the question of the Albanian littoral became highly probable. I have already described the attitude adopted by our Allies and friends in the face of this prospect. The patriotic impulses of certain of Serbia's representatives abroad rendered the dangers of the general situation still more acute. Thus, her Chargé d'Affaires in Berlin assured the German Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs that the Balkan Allies had definitely divided the Adriatic littoral among themselves, and that Serbia was certain of the benevolent support not only of Bulgaria, but also of Russia. It goes without saying that the Russian Government had never given Serbia any direct or indirect promise to this effect. With regard to Bulgaria, the treaty of alliance afforded Serbia no foundation for counting upon armed assistance from her ally in this matter. In bringing all this to the notice of Belgrade, I was obliged to request the Serbian Government not to render our rôle as protectors of Serbian interests more difficult, and not to lose sight of the fact that with regard to the question of Serbia's access to the Adriatic, we had to draw a distinction between the object desired and the means of attaining it. Our object was to ensure the fullest possible security for the economic independence of the Serbian State. As to the means of effecting this, it might be attained either by the possession of a part of the shore, or by a railway connection with one or other of the Adriatic ports; in return, Serbia might allow Austrian goods free access to Salonika, as the Austro-Hungarian Government demanded. If Serbia yielded in the matter of obtaining a port on the Albanian littoral, this would render it easier for her friends to obtain territorial expansion for her in the South, or a corresponding curtailment, to her advantage, of the territory of the future Albania. Even if Vienna did not take into account the fact that Austro-Hungarian interests demanded the establishment of the securest possible peace in the Balkan Peninsula, Serbia should not forget that by putting forward imprudent demands she ran the risk of losing the brilliant results she had gained in the war with Turkey.

Unfortunately these friendly warnings did not meet with the success in Belgrade which I had a right to expect. In the first place, popular excitement had been aroused by the victories

gained over the Turks, which exceeded the boldest expectations; and this success encouraged high hopes of a speedy realization of the national ideals. In the second place, the conduct of the Russian Minister in Belgrade, in fostering Serbian aspirations which, however justifiable in themselves, were at that time unattainable, placed the Russian Government in an awkward position. It found itself obliged to throw cold water upon these outbursts of enthusiasm, and to advise Belgrade to adopt a cautious and reasonable policy. Such advice is never willingly accepted by anyone, least of all in a moment of outstanding success. It was exceedingly difficult to persuade the Serbs that time was working for them, and against their opponents. They listened unwillingly to the arguments that I expressed in favour of a more tranquil attitude of waiting for political developments. These arguments I drew from the history of the Russian State, which had devoted itself to a similar policy for a period of a hundred and fifty years, during which it had to wage endless wars in the North and in the South in order to force a way to the sea – a problem which even then had not been fully solved.

Meanwhile I continued to use every effort to obtain, by means of amicable conversations with the Austro-Hungarian Government, at least a partial satisfaction of Serbian desires, by securing for her an exclusively commercial port on the Adriatic; but all my endeavours, which were supported by our Allies, were unsuccessful, meeting with united opposition from the Powers of the Triple Alliance.

In the beginning of November it became absolutely clear that Serbia could be established in any port whatsoever on the Adriatic only by force of arms – that is to say, at the cost of a European war. The lack of proportion between the end desired by the Triple Entente and the means necessary to attain it was plainly apparent. I have already said that any idea of a European war for the sake of a Serbian port on the Adriatic was out of the question – neither we nor our Allies and friends entertained it. Meanwhile tension in Serbia did not decrease, and Serbian troops prepared to occupy Durazzo. In order to leave no shadow of doubt in Belgrade as to the realities of the situation and the intentions of Russia, I was obliged to instruct Hartvig to warn the Serbian Government in these

terms: 'We will not go to war with the Triple Alliance for the sake of a Serbian port on the Adriatic. With regard to the decision of the Balkan Allies to divide up European Turkey among themselves without taking into consideration the interests of Austria and Italy, we warn Serbia against the consequences to which any rash policy might lead, by depriving her of the sympathy of France and England.' Finally I was obliged to caution our Serbian friends that we should be compelled to refuse them our support if they allowed themselves to go too far.

I have a lively recollection of how painful it was for me to play the part of an elder brother, and preach, to the Serbs, who enjoyed my full sympathy; but politica considerations insistently demanded Russia's decisive intervention in the Serbian affair, which threatened to cause a national catastrophe that must at all costs be averted in the interests of the Serbs themselves. Moreover, if there was a Government in Europe from which they could accept friendly advice without any feeling of offence or suspicion, it was certainly the Russian Government; they had no reason to doubt our sincerity, and our sympathies were bound up with the fate of Balkan Slavdom by innumerable sentimental and material considerations.

The whole of the first half of 1913 was spent in conveying admonitions of this kind to the Serbian Government, and in conducting negotiations with Austria-Hungary and Italy, behind whom unwaveringly stood their ally Germany. These negotiations concerned the establishment of Albania and the attainment in one way or another of an outlet to the Adriatic for Serbia. In order to give weight to its opinion the Vienna Cabinet proceeded to take certain military measures along the Austro-Hungarian frontiers. Thus five or six army corps were concentrated near the Serbian frontier, and the three corps in Galicia were brought up to war strength. The Russian Government replied by suspending the discharge of the reservists, and by completing the war equipment of the frontier troops. Nevertheless these precautionary measures were not such as to embarrass the further course of the diplomatic negotiations carried on by the Council of Ambassadors in London.

The work of this Conference proceeded very slowly, and the

representative of each of the Great Powers taking part in it set forth the proposal of his Government only with extreme caution, and after preparing the ground by preliminary conversations with the other members of the group of Powers with which his Government was associated. At that time not one of the European Governments desired to go to war, with the exception of the Austro-Hungarian, which was ready to attack Serbia in the hope of finding in this desperate course an antidote to the pitiful internal condition of the State; but this disposition did not meet with the necessary support from Germany. The other Powers were all averse to war, and each of them felt, not without alarm, that the danger of a European war might nevertheless arise suddenly at any moment. Even Austria-Hungary, although she adopted the attitude I have described, and continued to demand the establishment of an independent Albania, and to oppose the idea of allowing Serbia access to the Adriatic, did not go so far as to refrain from an outward display of conciliatoriness. Under the stress of circumstances, she consented to discuss with the other Powers the means for compensating Serbia for the injury occasioned her by the refusal of the Triple Alliance to allow her any territory whatsoever on the Adriatic littoral.

Thus the Conference of Ambassadors in London agreed without much trouble upon the principle of establishing an independent neutral Albania, under the suzerainty of the Sultan and the collective guarantee of the Great Powers; it was further agreed to grant Serbia the use of one of the Albanian ports, with the right of free import and export; this was to extend not only to the export of her own produce, but also, on the insistence of the Russian Government, to the import of every kind of arms and military material, both in peace and war. For this purpose it was proposed to connect the port in question with Serbia by means of a railway, which should, moreover, be placed under the control of the Great Powers. The neutralization of Albania, and consequently of the whole of the Albanian coast, gave this arrangement a certain real value from the point of view of Serbia's interests, which it would not have possessed had the port placed at her disposal been situated in territory not subject to a neutral régime. In any case, given the circumstances, neither Russia nor the other

members of the Triple Entente could effect a more rational solution of the problem of Serbia's access to the sea. This decision did not afford prompt or complete satisfaction to the national egotism of the Serbian people; nor did it adequately meet their economic necessities. But in estimating the results of Russia's efforts on behalf of Serbia, one must not lose sight of the fact that even if the Triple Entente had succeeded, at the London Conference, in exacting from the Triple Alliance the cession to Serbia of a part of the Albanian littoral, with the port of Durazzo or San Giovanni di Medua, this would not, in practice, have altered the situation. The question was closely bound up with the construction of a railway between certain centres of production and the sea; this required a long period of years and the expenditure of immense sums, and these difficulties would not have been obviated by the mere cession of territory, which would have facilitated matters only to an insignificant extent. Nothing short of the possession of the coasts of Croatia and Dalmatia, combined with access to the Ægean Sea, could give that completely satisfactory solution of the economic problems which the Serbian people had desired for so many years, and for which the Serbian Government had been preparing from the moment when the realization of the Greater-Serbia idea began to make its way into the realm of practical politics. At the time of the Balkan Wars these ideals had not yet taken shape. Between the Serbian people and their realization lay a world war with its endless suffering, and the unexampled self-sacrifices and heroism with which Serbia bought her national unification.

As long as the Balkan Allies stood face to face with the common foe, and were putting forth all their efforts to overcome him, the treaty of February 29, 1912, constituted a guarantee of their fidelity to one another as allies. But the period of hostilities, contrary to their expectations, proved surprisingly short. The battles were fierce but few in number, and generally speaking the Allies gained their victories with comparative ease. These were followed by a period of misunderstandings, mutual suspicions and quarrels, which threatened to turn the allies of yesterday into enemies of to-morrow, and to bring to nought the results achieved by their combined success. The region of Macedonia, so difficult to define in an

ethnographic sense, had long been an object of rivalry among them, and it again became the apple of discord. The partition provided for by the treaty between the Allies, which had been hastily prepared under the pressure of the urgent needs of the moment, now proved unsatisfactory, for it no longer corresponded to the expectations of any one of the signatories. The Serbs in particular were dissatisfied with it, since they had played a much larger part in the military operations in Eastern Macedonia and before Adrianople than they had anticipated. The situation was further complicated by the misunderstanding, which arose simultaneously, between Bulgaria and Greece with regard to the possession of Salonika. To the great vexation of the Bulgarians, the Greek army succeeded in occupying this town while the Bulgarian troops were assembling to enter it.

Russian diplomacy had observed with alarm the outbreak and rapid growth of the Serbo-Bulgarian quarrel, and employed every effort to prevent it from becoming a rupture, and still more an open conflict; which would have been a political as well as a moral catastrophe, and would have opened the door to the hostile intrigues of the Vienna Cabinet. The text of the treaty between the Allies gave Russia the right of intervention in case of misunderstandings between the Allies, by conferring upon the Emperor of Russia the office of mediator and arbitrator with regard to the delimitation of the Serbo-Bulgarian frontier. In order to avert, as far as possible, the danger of further complications between the Allies, and the dissolution of the Balkan Alliance before it had completed the work of national development which it had so successfully begun, the Imperial Government decided to take advantage of this right. It hoped thereby to render possible the completion of the task, although it was under no illusions with regard to the difficulties that would have to be overcome.

Meanwhile there was added to the already confused and complicated situation a new political factor, with which the Powers, and especially Russia, had to reckon seriously. This factor was Rumania, to which up till now only an indirect reference has been made. She was not, in the strict sense of the word, a Balkan State; but on account of her geographical position she was keenly interested in the fate of the Balkan Peninsula.

At the very beginning of the Balkan War, the Rumanian Government had announced its intention not to intervene in the struggle unless it resulted in territorial changes in the Balkans which might have political consequences disadvantageous for Rumania. In that case she would feel obliged to demand corresponding compensation for herself. The rapid successes of the Bulgarian troops foreshadowed the establishment on her frontiers of a new Bulgaria, increased in size, and strengthened by the augmentation of her population. This indisputable fact moved the Rumanian Government to demand from Bulgaria the cession of certain territory in the Dobrudja, in order to protect Rumania's strategic position on the Danube. She demanded the cession to herself of the town of Silistria, and the rectification of her frontiers by the transfer of Bulgarian territory from a point south of this town right up to Baltchik on the Black Sea. This demand, in itself exaggerated, rendered the efforts of the Triple Entente in the interests of peace still more difficult. They sought a way out of the complications which had arisen on the Danube, by handing over the Rumano-Bulgarian dispute to the arbitration of the Great Powers. The Geshov Cabinet, which was then in power in Bulgaria, was friendly to Russia, and Rumania's confidence in the policy of the Russian Government was gradually increasing. These facts led to the choice of St. Petersburg by both parties as the meeting-place of the arbitral conference.

At my invitation the Ambassadors of Austria-Hungary, Great Britain, Germany, Italy and France proceeded, on April 1, 1913, to examine the claims of Rumania. Although at the very first meeting the usual disagreement between the representatives of the Powers of the Triple Entente and the Triple Alliance became apparent, the work of the Conference proceeded peacefully. It was clear that none of the Governments represented desired, in connection with a question not of primary political importance, to pour oil on the flames of Balkan dissension, which were burning brightly enough without any such assistance. The representatives of the Triple Alliance, who at first fully supported the Rumanian demands, soon changed their point of view, and gave their adherence to the proposal of the Russian Government and those who shared its views; these, while admitting the justice of Rumania's demand

for a strategic rectification of her frontier, regarded the cession by Bulgaria of Silistria alone, without the transfer of any considerable portion of the Dobrudja, as a wholly sufficient guarantee in the respect. The labours of the Conference were completed by the 11th of April; the text of its decision was drawn up, and confirmed immediately afterwards by the Governments concerned, and was accepted without reservations by the contending parties. The town of Silistria, with a small extent of territory, was allotted to Rumania; the latter undertook to compensate all Bulgarians who expressed a desire to remove from the ceded district. Bulgaria accepted an obligation not to erect fortifications along her frontier up to the Black Sea, and agreed to the establishment of special bishoprics in the parts of conquered Macedonia inhabited by Wallachians, and to ecclesiastical and educational autonomy for the Rumanian population in these districts.

This exhausted the results of the St. Petersburg Conference. They were not very effective, but should have been recognized as satisfactory, for they obviated the possibility of fresh complications at a time which was already sufficiently disturbing and dangerous. Nevertheless the arrangement made by the Conference proved to be of short duration. The Peace of Bucharest, which concluded the second Balkan War, removed every trace of it; and Rumania rewarded herself with interest for the moderation which she had previously shown.

It was not so easy for Russian diplomacy to straighten out the very serious difficulties which lay at the bottom of Serbo-Bulgarian relations, which became more and more entangled. With these, other dangerous currents made their appearance and complicated not only the general political situation in the Balkans, but also threatened to draw the Great Powers into the struggle.

Despite the advice and admonitions of Russia, the occupation of Scutari by Serbian and Montenegrin troops seemed imminent. The pro-Slav enthusiasm of which I have already spoken had now reached its zenith and every day there were public demonstrations in honour of the Grand-Duke Nikolai Nikolaevich (son-in-law of the King of Montenegro), and of the Serbian and Bulgarian Ministers. Nevertheless the Russian Government pursued its course calmly, uninfluenced

by these noisy manifestations of Slav solidarity. Its policy was dictated by an exact knowledge of the political situation, and was designed to defend the real interests both of Russia and of the Balkan Slavs. These, however, managed to impede its execution to a certain extent, and thereby caused considerable anxiety to our friends and allies, who feared that the Government might abandon its position in face of the violent national passions kindled by this senseless and malicious agitation. The French Ambassador, M. Delcassé, was particularly disturbed by this aspect of the question, and did not conceal from me how unwelcome to the French Cabinet were these public demonstrations and the clamour of the press; for he feared they might lead to serious consequences should the Government display any weakness. His perfect tact, and the friendly relations which were quickly established between us, made it possible for me to allow him freely to express his opinions, which undoubtedly sprang from his sense of the common interests which we were both bound to defend. There was no need, however, to urge me to be firm. I would have resigned my post rather than yield to the pressure of irresponsible persons, or the clamour of the rabble. I discussed the matter quite frankly with the Emperor, and was glad to find how fair and excellent his judgment was in all cases where the Empress's will – unfortunately stronger than his own – did not overrule his personal views.

In order to terminate the dangerous uncertainty caused by the expectation that the Serbs and Montenegrins would occupy Scutari, and to calm the apprehensions of our friends abroad, I publicly declared that the views of the Imperial Government would undergo no change, even should this occupation take place; and that we should continue to regard Scutari as a province destined to form part of a future independent Albania. Shortly afterwards the Government forbade all open-air demonstrations of Slavonic sympathy, thus clearing the political atmosphere of the unhealthy currents introduced by irresponsible zealots.

On April 22, after brief negotiations between the commander of the Montenegrin detachment and Essad Pasha, who held Scutari, a treaty was signed, arranging for the surrender of the town to the Montenegrins. Henceforth, the

course of political events depended on two conditions, which it was very difficult to foresee: in the first place, was King Nicholas likely to yield to the solicitations of the Great Powers and abandon his claim to Scutari, in exchange for the compensations promised him? And secondly, if he refused, to what methods of coercion would Austria-Hungary resort in order to compel him to yield?

Although the Russian Government had firmly decided not to allow itself to be drawn into war on account of a secondary Balkan question, it was most important – for very comprehensible reasons – to prevent Austria-Hungary from taking the matter into her own hands and dealing separately with Montenegro. The great disparity between the forces of the Hapsburg Monarchy and those of the small Balkan kingdom would have lent an odious character to such a proceeding. It was impossible for Russia to take part in any coercive measures against Montenegro. All my efforts, therefore, were exerted to induce France and England to send warships to Antivari, and if necessary, to land troops there, in order to give an international character to the measures taken, and be less likely to wound the pride of a small State like Montenegro than action by a single Power. Such a course, moreover, would avert the danger of allowing Austria-Hungary to dispose without control of the fate of a Slavonic State that had enjoyed the friendship of Russia and the protection of our Sovereigns for over a century. It was very difficult to obtain agreement on this question, not only between the members of the Conference of Ambassadors in London, but even between the representatives of the Triple Entente, none of whom wished to take part in the inglorious enterprise of a naval demonstration in the waters of Antivari, forced upon Europe by the threat of separate action on the part of the Viennese Cabinet. On the 5th of May, after a fortnight of wearisome negotiations, King Nicholas at last declared that, in deference to the wishes of the Powers, he placed the fate of Scutari in their hands. This concluded an episode which had no intrinsic political importance, but which had for some time appeared to menace the peace of Europe. The only advantage which the Russian Government was able to obtain for the Serbs in return for the renunciation of the Montenegrin claim to Scutari,

was the cession of Ipek, Diakovo, Prizrén, and Dibra to the Balkan States. I am bound in fairness to add that in this matter Russian diplomacy received the support of the Berlin Cabinet.

Meanwhile, the Balkan situation was growing more strained every day. It was evident that if the internal relations of the Balkan Allies did not assume a more favourable aspect, a rupture, followed by open war, was inevitable. The situation was the more serious, in that it was impossible to expect any practical results from negotiations between the Balkan Governments themselves, as they had now adopted an irreconcilable attitude with regard to their respective claims. The Bulgarians, the Greeks and the Serbs all concentrated considerable forces in those districts which they hoped to be able to retain, and the temper of the troops was strained to such a point that the slightest incident might have provoked hostilities. The Russian Government was therefore obliged to abandon its original intention of arranging a meeting between the Prime Ministers of the three Balkan States, with a view to effecting an accommodation. There remained but a faint hope of persuading them to submit to arbitration by the Powers of the Triple Entente. Bulgaria seemed disposed to agree to this; but the plan had soon to be jettisoned as impracticable, in view of the opposition it would inevitably arouse on the part of the Triple Alliance, who would have regarded it as an attempt to solve the Balkan problem without their assistance. On the other hand, nothing was to be gained by inviting the Cabinets of the Triple Alliance, and especially the Viennese, to take part in its solution; at the best, this would have meant indefinitely protracted negotiations, whereas rapid and decisive action was essential; at the worst, it would have hastened the approach of the catastrophe. One of these alternatives, however, seemed inevitable, for at the London Conference Sir Edward Grey had the greatest difficulty in dissuading Austria-Hungary from coming to separate decisions and taking independent action.

In these circumstances I thought it best to resort to a measure for which the text of the Serbo-Bulgarian Treaty of Alliance provided the opportunity. I hoped to relieve the tension of the general situation by bringing about a peace

between at least two of the disputants, ignoring, for the time being, the quarrel between Greeks and Bulgarians.

I have already mentioned that the treaty between the Balkan Allies assigned the rôle of arbitrator to the Russian Sovereign, and I added that I had no very great confidence in the result. The intervention of Russia in this quarrel between two allies – a quarrel which was to be foreseen from the moment the alliance was formed – could only be of value if both sides had sufficient moral courage and political wisdom to submit willingly to arbitration. It was difficult to count upon such favourable conditions, whatever sympathy one might feel for the Slavs. Having the power to apply this measure, however, it was impossible not to resort to it at this critical juncture, when there was a grave risk of seeing the brilliant results attained by the Allies irretrievably forfeited.

It was inevitable that in proposing the Russian Sovereign as arbitrator to the Serbs and Bulgarians, the St. Petersburg Cabinet should make it a condition that the Emperor's decision must be accepted without reserve by both disputants. A further condition was added, namely, the maintenance of the Balkan Alliance. It seemed at first that these conditions would meet with no opposition from the Allies. Soon, however, it became evident that neither the Bulgarians nor the Serbs were disposed to place their interests unreservedly in the hands of Russia; they preferred to count on other, more practical methods of safeguarding them than could be afforded by the most impartial arbitration. At the end of May the Greeks, who expected every moment that the Bulgars would attack them, in order to dislodge them from Salonika, held similar views. Although the treaty between the Allies, in so far as it concerned the Greeks, contained no reference to the possibility of arbitration, the Russian Government and the other Governments of the Entente tried to induce M. Venizelos to submit the Greeko-Bulgarian quarrel to the judgment either of Russia or of the Powers. Serbia seemed convinced that, whatever the Government of M. Pashich might do, no agreement could be reached with Bulgaria, and that war was inevitable. The news that reached us from Sofia indicated a state of extreme tension in military circles, with which MM.

Geshov and Daneff, whose peaceful intentions could be relied on up to a certain point, would hardly be able to cope. In Bulgaria, moreover, the final decision lay with the King, whose real intentions no one ever knew. At the same time we were informed, from Vienna, that the Austro-Hungarian Cabinet was inciting Ferdinand of Coburg to hold out, and promising him support; while the German and Austro-Hungarian representatives in Bucharest were using their influence to prevent the Rumanian Government from complicating the Bulgarian situation. These conditions were very serious. I was thus driven to resort to the extreme course of intervention by the Emperor, in the form of a personal appeal to the Kings of Serbia and Bulgaria to cease their contest and leave the problem in his hands. I hesitated for some time before resolving to induce His Majesty to intervene personally in the conflict. I realized the responsibility I was taking upon myself, from the point of view of Russia's prestige abroad, in risking a rebuff from the Balkan Sovereigns. In spite of this consideration, knowing the Emperor well, I urged him to throw the weight of his personal influence into the scale, as the last hope of averting a fratricidal war between two Slavonic nations, on whose fate Russia had exercised a decisive influence.

The whole Russian Empire was celebrating, at the time, the tercentenary of the reigning House of Romanov, and the Court and the chief members of the Government were in Moscow. At the present moment Russia, shaken to her foundations by a social cataclysm, has been torn out of the historical soil in which, in spite of delays and set-backs, she has grown and developed, gradually shedding the old, worn-out forms of her political organization. Men who are alien to her in spirit, and often in race, have undertaken to transplant her roots to a barren soil, unfavourable to any kind of culture. There is an abyss between her past, which is still fresh in our minds, and the cheerless present, which it will need at the least one generation of human lives to bridge, lives sacrificed to this criminal endeavour to break the continuity of her national life. Those who did not witness it are unable to conceive the deep and sincere enthusiasm which swept through Russia at that moment. The Romanovs, whose tercentenary was being celebrated in Moscow and Kostroma, were the creators of

modern Russia, with all her past glories and her unlimited possibilities of peaceful development and prosperity in the future.

In the course of these unforgettable days I was given an audience by the Emperor in the Kremlin, now transformed into an inaccessible citadel of Bolshevism, where its leaders live under the vigilant guard of their 'Janissaries.' It was here that the voice of Alexander II sounded in 1876, urging Russia to take upon herself the great task of liberating the Bulgarians from the yoke of the Turks. In view of these historic associations, I thought that the Emperor's appeal for peace and union between hostile Slav brothers ought to come from the Kremlin.

When I explained the reasons which obliged me to resort to personal intervention by the Emperor as a last hope of avoiding a war in the Balkans, His Majesty asked me if I could frankly tell him that all other means of attaining a peaceful solution of the Serbo-Bulgarian quarrel had been tried in vain. He also inquired whether I was sure that a personal appeal on his part would have the desired effect. I could without hesitation answer the first of these questions in the affirmative. As to the second, I was obliged to confess my uncertainty. I told the Emperor that I realized the responsibility I assumed in urging him to take the unusual step of intervening in person in a dispute between two independent States; yet the possibility of this step had been foreseen when the treaty was signed between the Allies, as though in prevision of the difficulties that had now arisen. I felt, too, that if war should break out between the Serbs and the Bulgarians, the Emperor would regret not having tried this final method of securing a peaceful settlement of the problem. He listened attentively to all I had to say, and after hesitating for a moment, told me that he would sign the appeal to the Kings of Serbia and Bulgaria, if I had brought the text with me, as he supposed I had. He felt it, he said, to be not only his right, but his duty to warn them, at this critical moment, of the consequences of a conflict. 'If they refuse to listen to me,' said the Emperor, 'the instigators of the trouble will bear the punishment. I shall have done my duty and my conscience will be at rest.' All this was said with the charming simplicity which charac-

terized him, and which had an irresistible effect upon me, and upon all those who were open to such impressions.

The Emperor read the draft of the telegram I had brought with me, and ordered me to dispatch it at once, desiring that his appeal for union and fraternity among the Slavs should come from Moscow. As I left the Kremlin, I reflected upon the conversation, and the possible results of the Emperor's decision. Two facts stood out clearly in the general impression left by this interview, namely, that the Emperor Nicholas, unlike most people, did not regard true glory as synonymous with worldly success; and that personal pride played no part in his decisions when they were prompted by a sense of duty. These thoughts still further strengthened the affection and devotion which I felt for him.

The news from Belgrade was not reassuring. The conviction was gaining ground among the Serbs that the hostile attitude of the Bulgarian Government towards the Serbian demands for a revision of certain clauses of the Treaty must inevitably lead to war, even if it were possible, with the help of Russia, to find a temporary solution of the present difficulties. The Serbs demanded a fresh partition of Macedonia between the Allies, with the object of rewarding themselves for their active help in the siege of Adrianople. Official personages turned to me for advice as to Serbia's course in face of these new difficulties and complications; but they did not conceal from me that in their own opinion her best course would be to open hostilities at once, thus forestalling any action on the part of Bulgaria. The army was confident of success. I replied that I did not consider myself in a position to offer strategic advice; but from a political no less than a moral point of view – which it would be dangerous to ignore – such a policy would cause irreparable damage to Serbia, damage for which no military success could compensate her.

The Emperor's telegram to the Kings of Serbia and Bulgaria was preceded by an invitation from the Russian Government to the Prime Ministers of the Balkan States, including Greece, to meet in St. Petersburg, with the object of settling their difficulties. Russia had previously insisted upon an interview between M. Geshov and M. Pashich, which was to be reinforced by the presence of M. Venizelos. This interview pro-

duced a temporary calm in the political atmosphere of the Balkans. Soon, however, it became clear that neither the Serbian nor the Bulgarian Minister had made any peaceful overtures, and the situation remained as strained as ever.

When the text of the Emperor's summons to peace and concord became known abroad, it produced a deep impression everywhere, especially in the Balkan States. Even the enemies of Russia were forced to acknowledge the sincerity and complete disinterestedness of this appeal, and its profoundly peaceful character. It revealed in the clearest light the whole Near-Eastern policy of the St. Petersburg Cabinet at this critical moment in Balkan history. There could be but one answer to such an appeal – the surrender of the problem into the hands of Russia, and an unreserved acceptance of her decisions. And, in outward form at least, this answer soon followed. The King of Bulgaria was the first to reply that he accepted Russia's mediation; at the same time he drew attention to Serbia's ambiguous attitude with regard to her obligations as ally, and to the indignation of the Bulgarians at her attempt to deprive them of the fruits of victory.

After Ferdinand of Coburg's telegram came the reply of King Peter of Serbia, who also complained of the attitude of his allies with regard to his country's just demands; but he concluded by saying that he placed complete confidence in the justice and benevolence of Russia.

There is no doubt that the first of these answers expressed the King's consent to submit the Balkan quarrel to the Emperor's decision more categorically than the second. If my memory does not deceive me, there was no direct reference, in King Peter's reply, to arbitration by the Emperor. But in comparing the two answers we must bear in mind the fact that King Ferdinand's telegram was sent less than a fortnight before June 17, when the Bulgarian troops attacked the Serbian outposts at Bregalnitza, thus opening the second Balkan War. This war was not waged by the Allies against a common foe, but by two of them against Bulgaria, who wished to decide the Macedonian question in her own favour, and to establish her predominance in the Balkans by means of a treacherous attack on her allies. The Russian Government never obtained any direct proofs of the complicity of the

Viennese Cabinet in these designs; but we had sufficient reason to believe that Ferdinand of Coburg had not taken the initiative in this matter without the knowledge and encouragement of the Austro-Hungarian Government. The moral responsibility of the Viennese Cabinet for this treacherous attempt is all the more probable since Austrian diplomacy – as I have said before – could never reconcile itself to the fact that the first Balkan War had ended in a brilliant victory for the Allies. They had hoped for the annihilation of Serbia and the destruction of her army; whereas this victory led to a corresponding territorial enlargement of all the Balkan States, including Serbia, whose army had exhibited great fighting qualities and a splendid military organization. In supporting Ferdinand of Coburg, the Viennese diplomats hoped to atone for their previous lack of foresight, and wipe out their heavy moral defeat. Events ultimately proved, however, that their hopes and calculations were again mistaken. Serbia, whom they so virulently hated, emerged triumphant from this second ordeal, and her victories brought her considerably nearer to the realization of her Pan-Serbian ambitions.

The first Balkan War had been very short, but the second was even shorter. Less than a month elapsed between the battle of Ovtche-Polé, following the attack on Bregalnitza which opened the war, and the complete destruction of King Ferdinand's army on July 13. The Serbs and the Greeks advanced irresistibly from the West and the South, while Rumanian troops crossed the Danube, in order to support future demands for territorial cessions in the Dobrudja. The Turks themselves left the lines of Tchataldja, where the victorious Bulgarian offensive had been stopped some time before, and began to move in the direction of Adrianople. It seemed as though punishment had never before followed crime so closely. Nothing short of an immediate armistice could save Bulgaria from utter ruin. The destruction of Bulgaria did not, however, enter into the views of the Powers, and still less into those of Russia. The St. Petersburg Cabinet therefore at once stepped forward in Sofia with an urgent demand for a suspension of hostilities. The same demand was simultaneously presented in Belgrade, Bucharest and Athens, with a general indication of the fundamental conditions of future peace.

Serbia was to receive all the territory lying to the west of the watershed of the Vardar and the Struma, while Greece acquired the whole of Southern Macedonia, with the town of Séres and the coast of the Ægean up to the Bay of Orphano. Rumania had already declared her intention of removing her Bulgarian frontier to the line of Turtukai-Baltchik.

Our demand for an immediate armistice was favourably received in Belgrade. In Athens, on the contrary, it was actively opposed by M. Venizelos, whose ambitious schemes for his country were not easily satisfied. Not content with Salonika for Greece, he cast covetous eyes on Kavala. This would leave only Dedeagach on the Ægean – a town quite unsuitable for a commercial port – for Bulgaria. The Powers were obliged to take into consideration the demands of Greece, however exaggerated, owing to signs of a growing friendship between the Emperor Wilhelm and his brother-in-law, King Constantine, which had not hitherto been apparent. Some time before, the Berlin Court had responded with complete indifference to the attempts made by the Kaiser's poor Greek relations to ingratiate themselves with their powerful kinsman. This friendship particularly troubled the French Government, which feared that by opposing the desires of Greece, it might forfeit the influence it enjoyed in Athens – an influence due to France's traditional Grecophile policy – and might see its place there usurped by the Germans. As to the British Government, it did not exhibit any particular interest in the question of an immediate armistice.

A great point was gained, however, by the fact that the general terms of peace contained in the Russian proposal had been accepted by the Bulgarian Government. Joint action by the Powers being impossible, it only remained to secure an immediate suspension of hostilities by means of direct negotiations between the belligerents, and to agree upon the place where the conditions of peace should be discussed. The choice at first lay between London and Paris, as the Triple Alliance would undoubtedly have vetoed St. Petersburg, the Russian capital being unacceptable to Austria-Hungary as the scene of diplomatic negotiations on Balkan affairs. It was difficult, without overburdening the British Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, Sir Edward Grey, to expect him to preside

over a new conference in London, where the Peace Treaty that concluded the first Balkan War had just been signed, and where a Conference of Ambassadors was still sitting under his presidency. Paris was less inacceptable to the Central Powers than St. Petersburg, but it too did not appeal to the Governments of the Triple Alliance. Therefore, when the Berlin Cabinet proposed Bucharest as a centre for the new peace negotiations, this proposal met with no objections from any of the Powers.

It was high time to put an end to military operations, for the Turks, profiting by the complete disorganization of the Bulgarian forces and the panic reigning in Sofia – upon which the Rumanian troops were marching from Varna – had entered Adrianople unopposed. This action violated the Treaty of London, by which the town was handed over to Bulgaria, and the Turko-Bulgarian frontier drawn from Enos on the Ægean, to Midia on the Black Sea. It was impossible to allow Turkey to infringe thus wilfully the treaty she had just signed; further, the seizure of Adrianople meant that the whole of Southern Thrace, where the majority of the population was Christian, fell once more under the dominion of the Turkish Government. No one could doubt what this fresh submission to the Turks would mean for the Greek and Bulgarian population of that province.

Although our natural sympathies for the Bulgarians as a people whom we had liberated had been considerably weakened by their treacherous attack on their allies, the seizure of Adrianople by the Turks caused general indignation in Russia. The Emperor, interrupting his cruise in the Fiords of Finland, returned to St. Petersburg to confer on the measures to be taken to restore the treaty violated by the Turks. I felt bound to speak very plainly on this matter to the Turkish Ambassador, Turkhan-Pasha – for whom I had a great personal liking – and to make him understand that the Russian Government could not consent to a violation of the Treaty of London. The British Prime Minister expressed himself officially in the same sense, while serious warnings reached Turkey from Paris. At the same time, however, I was informed from Berlin that the German Government would take no part in any hostile demonstration against Turkey; the same dis-

position seemed to prevail in Italy, and our Ambassador in Rome was informed that the Italian Government would not take part in coercive measures against Turkey.

These dissensions were yet another instance of the acute and irreconcilable divergence of opinion between the Great Powers on many Near-Eastern questions. The absence of common European interests was clearly revealed, and agreement between the Powers seemed unattainable, even when it was only a question of defending fundamental points of Christian ethics. A naval demonstration by the Triple Entente would have been sufficient to compel the Turks to fulfil the obligations of the London Treaty, to evacuate Adrianople and withdraw to the Enos-Midia line. But this was impracticable, for such a demonstration would have revealed the fundamental opposition between the policies of the Great Powers at a moment when it was essential to maintain, in the Near East, the fiction of harmony and concord in European politics. The Conference of Ambassadors could only instruct the representatives of the Great Powers in Constantinople to make a solemn declaration affirming the absolute necessity of maintaining the provisions of the Treaty of London with regard to the new Turco-Bulgarian frontier. At the same time the Powers promised to give full consideration to the measures which Turkey deemed necessary to guarantee the security of that frontier.

The misfortunes of Bulgaria, which were the direct consequence of King Ferdinand's treachery, caused her to regain some of the sympathy she had formerly enjoyed in Russia. Public opinion watched the course of events in the Balkans with growing anxiety, and the Imperial Government spared no effort to foster the sympathetic attitude towards Bulgaria which the question of Adrianople had produced in Europe. The situation became paradoxical; Austria-Hungary supported us in the matter of ceding Kavala to Bulgaria, and thus found herself on our side and in opposition to Germany, which was beginning to offer open encouragement to the pretensions of Greece. The motives for this policy were, even then, not difficult to divine; but their true significance was not apparent until the European War of 1914. On the other hand, as I have already indicated, our Ally France did not share our views as to the necessity of allowing Bulgaria an additional

port on the Ægean, although this port was indispensable to her Mediterranean trade. By maintaining friendly relations with Greece, France hoped to prevent Germany from establishing a preponderant influence in Athens, which was bound to prejudice the influence she herself had enjoyed there since the time of the Greek War of Independence. The conduct of King Constantine during the world war soon proved the error of these calculations.

In any case, the imbroglio which had occurred in the relations of the Great Powers was a passing one, and had no harmful influence on the solidity of the respective alliances. The Viennese Cabinet received a hint from Berlin to abandon the rôle of protector, if not of Bulgaria, at least of Ferdinand of Coburg, and Kavala was finally handed over to Greece at the insistent demand of the Kaiser. The King of Bulgaria sent a personal appeal to the President of the French Republic, but this failed to modify the negative attitude of the French Government towards Bulgaria's demand for a second port on the Ægean. The British Government remained neutral on this question, and the Russian Government, although maintaining its opinion, did not consider it necessary to prolong the negotiations, and so delay the conclusion of a peace ardently desired by every one, for the sake of the cession of Kavala to one or other of the Balkan States.

On August 10, the negotiations between Rumania and the Balkan States were concluded, and the Treaty of Bucharest was signed: Bulgaria agreed to repay the expenditure incurred both by her former allies and by Rumania. The latter had taken no part in the war, but having occupied part of Bulgaria without firing a shot, obtained as reward a considerable accession of territory.

The Peace of Bucharest was but a plaster upon the unhealed Balkan wounds, which were destined to re-open before a year had elapsed. But in any case it was a serious blow to Austria-Hungary, for it confirmed the new and brilliant victories gained by Serbia in the course of the preceding year. The growth of this young Slavonic State on the frontiers of Austria-Hungary was incompatible with the aims of Viennese diplomacy, which succeeded in arresting its development to a certain extent, though only for a short time, by depriving it of

free access to the Adriatic. As to Bulgaria, the Peace of Bucharest put an end to King Ferdinand's dream of a Bulgarian kingdom extending from the borders of Albania to the Sea of Marmora. The bitterness of failure and disappointment, as well as their secret rancour against those whom they considered responsible for their discomfiture, brought the Bulgarian King and his accomplices into close contact with the Viennese Cabinet – a fact which was proved only too clearly after the outbreak of war in 1914.

CHAPTER V

One of the first questions that seriously attracted my attention on my appointment as Minister for Foreign Affairs, was that of our relations with Rumania. When I first took up my duties I was unable to devote as much time as I wished to this question, which I felt merited close attention, for at that time all my efforts were directed towards the improvement of our relations with Germany. These relations were then far from satisfactory, and I considered it indispensable to establish them on a sound basis before turning my attention to anything else. I could not imagine a Russian Minister of Foreign Affairs successfully conducting a peaceful policy, necessary to the interests of Russia as well as of Europe, and in harmony with the sentiment of the Russian people, in the absence of that essential condition.

A serious illness unfortunately compelled me to abandon, for a considerable time, the work I had just begun; and I entrusted the negotiations with Berlin to my assistant, M. Neratov, upon whose experience, tact and thorough knowledge of those affairs I could absolutely rely. Much as the Rumanian question interested me, it had to be removed from the agenda for some time, and its study – from the point of view of future political possibilities – deferred to a more favourable occasion.

When I returned to my post, I endeavoured to make up for lost time, and missed no opportunity of gaining information upon Rumania's foreign policy, and the internal condition of the country. I knew that not only was she favourably inclined towards the Powers of the Triple Alliance, but she was actually bound by treaties to two of them, and therefore belonged to the camp of our political opponents. I was also aware of the reasons which rendered her policy hostile to Russia. Speaking generally, her attitude was due to the feeling of irritation inherited from the political leaders who played a great part in the war of 1877, and who were indignant with Russia for recovering, at the conclusion of the war with Turkey, the three southern districts of Bessarabia – which we had lost by the Treaty of Paris – in spite of our promise to Rumania to keep her territory intact. Looking back impartially upon this distant event, I am ready to admit that

Russia may have been to blame, during the period that followed the war, in certain matters of form with regard to her ally. Small States are always inclined to be sensitive on such points, and to retain – as in this instance – a feeling of offence and lasting ill-will. But I feel obliged to point out, at the same time, that the Rumanian interpretation of this incident, which I have always sincerely deplored, does not altogether correspond to the truth. I entered the Diplomatic Service five years after the Congress of Berlin, and was personally acquainted with most of those who had taken part in the negotiations of 1878. At the time of which I am speaking, many of them still occupied responsible posts in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. I repeatedly heard them say that M. Bratiano (father of the present Prime Minister of Rumania) had come to Livadia, before the beginning of the war, in order to see the Emperor Alexander II, who was living there at the time, and open negotiations for an alliance against Turkey; and that the Rumanian Government had been informed, through him, of Russia's intention to recover the province on the banks of the Danube, where the Moldavian element was but feebly represented. I was told, it is true, that this intimation was not made in writing, but orally, although in very unequivocal terms. It is therefore difficult at present to determine whence arose the legend of a crafty plot, to which Rumania fell a victim. It is one of the innumerable facts not yet elucidated, in which political history has always abounded; recent times are no exception to this rule. In any case, there is no doubt that the Rumanian interpretation was accepted without the slightest criticism by public opinion in Rumania and with real or pretended conviction by our ill-wishers abroad. The fact that Russia had ceded to Rumania, in exchange for the three southern districts of Bessarabia, the conquered province of Dobrudja, thus providing her with free access to the sea, was either totally ignored in the patriotic Rumanian press, or else mentioned as an insignificant circumstance, in no way compensating her for her moral and material injury.

This regrettable misunderstanding took firm root in Rumania and formed the basis of her relations with Russia. It was artificially fostered by Germany and Austria-Hungary, who had every interest in so doing; they had both held a pro-

minent position in Bucharest since the war of 1877, when the authority of Prince Charles of Hohenzollern was consolidated by his becoming King of Rumania. Owing to the clever and methodical anti-Russian propaganda carried on in Bucharest, distrust of Russia became a kind of dogma with Rumanian political leaders. The New Conservative party, headed by M. Karp, who was strongly pro-German – and therefore enjoyed the favour of King Charles – was particularly ill-disposed towards us, but the Liberals were to some extent inclined to exhibit similar feelings, owing, perhaps, to the family tradition of their chief, M. Bratiano. In short, no one in Rumania was inclined to be friendly or even impartial to us. Up to the time of the Great War, which has changed all political values, no one ever stopped to consider whether Rumania could expect any fresh disappointment from Russia; or, reversing the question, what substantial profit she could gain by treating her Eastern neighbour as a political enemy, and by taking Austria-Hungary for a friend. Austria held Transylvania, with its four million purely Rumanian inhabitants, representing the most valuable part of the Rumanian nation from the point of view of culture and civilization. It is true that Berlin and Vienna beguiled Rumania with the most brilliant prospects. They promised her not only the retrocession of the three Bessarabian districts of which Russia had deprived her, but the cession of the whole of this province, with its Moldavian population, which certainly did not consider itself Rumanian. It had never in fact been Rumanian, having been annexed to Russia by the Treaty of Bucharest in 1812, when Rumania did not as yet exist, and there were merely two separate Danubian Principalities. Moreover, it had long ago grown accustomed to Russian rule, under which it had attained a degree of culture and economic prosperity which no part of Rumania – where the peasant population was in a state akin to serfdom – had ever enjoyed.[1] These ambitious prospects could only be realized, of course, by means of a victorious war with Russia; in other words, their realization depended on conditions which it was far beyond Rumania's power to achieve. This circum-

[1] Bessarabia was one of the Russian provinces in which serfdom had never existed, or had existed only in the case of the Bohemian or 'Tzigan' population.

stance considerably diminished their practical value, and should have called up, in the minds of reasonable people, serious doubts as to the expediency of a hostile policy towards Russia.[1]

On the other hand, Rumania might expect, from a close connection with Russia and the Triple Entente, the realization of her national unity, by the absorption of a population of nearly five million Rumanians who were under the Magyar yoke, and sincerely desired reunion with their brothers across the frontier. I considered it our duty to endeavour to clarify the views of the Rumanian Government and public opinion upon the essentially simple question of their political interests, and to bring them, so far as lay in our power, to realize the anomaly and inexpediency of the domestic and foreign policy which Rumania had adopted under the influence of Germany. Naturally, my chief aim was to serve the interests of Russia by bringing about a reconciliation with a neighbouring country, from whom we demanded nothing but friendship and goodwill, but who might, on the other hand, expect substantial help from us in the matter of her national restoration, when, in the inevitable course of political developments, the suitable moment arrived.

My active interest in Rumanian affairs coincided with a change in the policy of the Rumanian Liberal party, which began to criticize the inveterate habit of Court and Conservative circles of drawing their inspiration solely from German sources. This change was chiefly due to M. Bratiano, the head of the Liberal Government, who was now once more Prime Minister. This happy coincidence considerably facilitated the

[1] Although Rumania succeeded, some time after the conclusion of the Treaty of Versailles, in removing her frontier from the Pruth to the Dniester, this was evidently not due to her alliance with the Central Powers, but to the fact that she had deserted them in 1916. She was rewarded for this by the former allies of Russia through the annexation – besides the stipulated parts of Hungary and the whole of Bukovina and Transylvania – of the whole province of Bessarabia, without recourse to any plebiscite, simply on the basis of a decision of the local Provincial Assembly, acting under pressure from Bucharest. The annexation of the whole of Bessarabia was obviously due to a desire on the part of our former allies to chastise the Russian people – whom they did not consider sufficiently punished by the ruin of their country – for the treachery of the Bolsheviks.

attainment of my object. I tried to impart greater confidence to my official relations with M. Diamandi, the Rumanian Minister in St. Petersburg, knowing that he enjoyed the special favour of M. Bratiano. My task was further simplified by the fact that M. Diamandi was an intelligent man, free from obsolete political prejudices, who willingly met my friendly overtures half-way. On the other hand, I selected our representatives in Rumania with care, instructing them to establish the most amicable relations with the Rumanian Government and Bucharest society

With the same end in view, I not only endeavoured to obtain the Emperor's consent to a new policy with regard to Rumania but requested him to take an active personal share in that policy, which without his support would have been doomed to failure. I have already mentioned that the Emperor readily grasped questions of foreign politics, and I had no reason to doubt his sympathy with a new initiative that might be of great utility to Russia. After several reports on the question, in the course of which I explained my views and suggested that Russia ought to take the first step towards a political reconciliation with Rumania, in order to prevent her from passing irrevocably into the camp of our enemies, the Emperor began to take a serious interest in the affair, and expressed a desire to participate in the efforts of his Government. It was not difficult to find an occasion for this.

At the Conference held under my presidency in St. Petersburg in the spring of 1913 it had been decided to satisfy the demands of Rumania concerning the cession of Silistria and the guaranteeing of her Danube frontier – a decision to which Russia had actively contributed. This Conference could easily be made the starting-point for further friendly proceedings.

The first sign of renewed friendship, after a long period of estrangement, was the bestowal by the Emperor of the Field-Marshal's bâton on King Charles, in memory of the latter's share in the victories of our allied troops in the war of 1877–78. This gesture was the Emperor's own idea, and I could but sincerely sympathize with it as a manifestation of his personal desire for reconciliation with Rumania, which I considered to be of the first importance. When informing me of his intention, the Emperor added that he wished to make the ceremony

particularly impressive by sending a member of the Imperial Family to confer the bâton; but he was in doubt as to the choice of this personage. I was personally well acquainted with the late Grand Duke Nikolai Mikhailovich, and knowing his interest in all questions of foreign politics, I suggested that the Emperor should entrust him with this honourable mission. He was further qualified for it by the fact that his numerous works on Russian history of the early nineteenth century were well known abroad.

Before leaving for Bucharest, the Grand Duke came to see me, in order to receive detailed instructions concerning the object of his mission, which, as I had foreseen, deeply interested him. I had no particular instructions to give him, but begged him to convey the friendly and peaceful dispositions which he could not have failed to observe in Russia, and which coincided with the sincere desire of the Emperor and his Government to establish our relations with Rumania on a more intimate and friendly footing than of late. I requested the Grand Duke to find out what feelings towards Russia prevailed at the moment in Rumania, and to compare his impressions with the information which would be placed at his disposal by our Minister, M. Shebeko, whose position in Bucharest was excellent. I knew that the Grand Duke possessed a keen interest in all sorts of knowledge, combined with a certain quantity of curiosity, which he sought to satisfy, wherever he found himself, by getting into touch with as many people of different social classes as possible,

On his return from Bucharest, the Grand Duke informed me that King Charles had been deeply touched by the signal honour conferred upon him by the Emperor, which had been highly valued both in political circles and by public opinion in Rumania. He considered that our attempt to establish more friendly relations had been met with sympathy by the Government and Rumanian society in general. The Conservative party alone formed an exception, remaining true to its German sympathies. Unfortunately this also applied to the King, whose treaties with Germany had linked the fate of Rumania with that of his Fatherland. On the other hand, the Crown Prince, and especially his intelligent and energetic wife (whose mother was a daughter of the Emperor Alexander II), as well

as numerous members of the Liberal Party, with the Prime Minister, M. Bratiano, at their head, seemed open to the influence of new political ideas. Such was the opinion of the Grand Duke, to whom they had expressed their views quite frankly. This was of course a favourable omen for our future relations with Rumania. There was little that was new to me in all the Grand Duke told me; but I was glad to have the information that I received from diplomatic sources confirmed by a man who had just returned from Bucharest, and who was by nature observant.

Soon after the Grand Duke's journey to Bucharest, an impressive ceremony took place in St. Petersburg – the unveiling of a monument erected to the memory of the Grand Duke Nikolai Nikolaevich, Commander-in-Chief of our armies in the Turkish War of 1877. In remembrance of our brotherhood in arms in the struggle for the liberation of Bulgaria, the Emperor invited the Rumanian Court and representatives of the Rumanian Army to be present at the ceremony. The Crown Prince Ferdinand and his wife, the Princess Marie, accordingly came to St. Petersburg, accompanied by their eldest son, a youth of twenty. They spent about a week at Tsarskoié-Sélo, and I had several opportunities of conversation with them. Their arrival in Russia gave birth to rumours, which were not unfounded, concerning the possibility of an engagement between one of the elder daughters of the Emperor and Prince Charles. This marriage would have been in many ways a suitable one. I considered it desirable from a political point of view, and did not conceal my opinion from the Emperor and Empress. Their Majesties did not oppose my arguments, but insisted that the young people should first become better acquainted; they made their daughter's free will and consent – the Grand Duchess Olga Nikolaevna was chiefly mentioned in this connection – an express condition to the match.

Anyone acquainted with the family atmosphere at Tsarskoié-Sélo will not be surprised at this. In the Imperial Family, parents and children were united by the closest bonds of affection, and a marriage contracted for purely political reasons – in other words, by constraint – was regarded as utterly impossible. I recollect a conversation I once had on this subject with the Empress, on the terrace of the Palace of

Livadia. 'I think with terror,' said the Empress, 'that the time draws near when I shall have to part with my daughters. I could desire nothing better than that they should remain in Russia after their marriage. But I have four daughters, and it is, of course, impossible. You know how difficult marriages are in reigning families. I know it by experience, although I was never in the position my daughters occupy, being the daughter of the Grand Duke of Hesse, and running little risk of being obliged to make a political match. Still, I was once threatened with the danger of marrying without love or even affection, and I vividly remember the torments I endured when . . .' – the Empress named a member of one of the German reigning houses – 'arrived at Darmstadt, and I was informed that he intended to marry me. I did not know him at all, and I shall never forget what I suffered when I met him for the first time. My grandmother, Queen Victoria, took pity on me, and I was left in peace. God disposed otherwise of my fate, and granted me undreamed-of happiness. All the more then do I feel it my duty to leave my daughters free to marry according to their inclination. The Emperor will have to decide whether he considers this or that marriage suitable for his daughters, but parental authority must not extend beyond that.' At the end of our conversation the Empress made another characteristic remark on the material aspect of the question, which I quote because it proves how strong an influence twenty years of life as Empress of Russia had had upon her views: 'Think,' said she, 'what it means for a Russian Grand Duchess to marry a foreigner, even under the best and happiest conditions. Here again I speak from experience. Compare their way of living here, and all they enjoy at home, with what awaits them abroad in the majority of cases. It is hard for them to make up their minds to exchange their present life for a new one; there must be at least a strong attachment in order to make the transition tolerable.'

The anxiety of the Empress for her daughters' future was only too well founded. But the terrible fate which, by a cruel irony, was reserved for them, neither she nor I – if not a member, a devoted adherent of the family – as we sat in the fragrant gardens of Livadia, could then foresee.

In order to consolidate our good relations with Rumania, it

was necessary to crown the efforts of Russian diplomacy by persuading the Emperor to return the visit which King Charles had paid him several years before in Peterhof. During my stay at Livadia in the spring of 1914, I pointed out to the Emperor that it was essential that he should undertake this journey. He had abandoned the idea, feeling convinced that Rumania could no longer be regarded as a free and independent State, but only as an appanage of the Triple Alliance.

I told the Emperor that I thought he could easily visit Rumania while the Court was at Livadia. The Imperial Family could travel by sea to Constanza and then, if the interview was to take place in Bucharest, proceed by land to the Rumanian capital, which was not very far from that port. On the other hand, if it could take place at Constanza, where the King and Queen of Rumania usually stayed for some time in the summer, the matter would be simpler still. The Emperor agreed with my suggestion, and commissioned me, a few days later, to inform the Rumanian Court of his desire to pay a visit to King Charles at Constanza, accompanied by the Empress and all the children. The interview was fixed, by mutual arrangement, for the 1st of June.

I travelled by land from St. Petersburg to Constanza, arriving there a short time before the Imperial yacht, the *Standart*, and was present at the ceremonial reception, in the harbour, of the Imperial Family by the King and Queen of Rumania and the Crown Prince and his family. The usual presentations were made, followed by a review of troops and a banquet, with an exchange of cordial speeches. The Emperor gave an audience to the Prime Minister, M. Bratiano, and I was received in a lengthy audience by the King. In the course of our conversation he spoke with much feeling of the Emperor, as aged people are wont to speak of men much younger than themselves towards whom they feel attracted.

This old and wise Hohenzollern, who occupied the throne of a foreign land, so far from his own home and so different from it in every way, looked back with a certain pride upon the long years of his reign, and upon his exertions for the organization and development of his adopted country. He cared for it with real German tenacity of purpose, acting in the true German

spirit and always endeavouring to strengthen its ties with his Fatherland, whose horizon bounded his political vision. Touching on questions of contemporary politics, King Charles asked me if I foresaw the possibility of a European war. He evidently regarded that question with anxiety, which was but natural in a sovereign who had been closely concerned in the Balkan events of the previous two years. Although it seemed, in June, 1914, as though Europe had happily escaped Balkan complications, yet no one intimately connected with politics had any firm confidence that this happy state of affairs would last. We all knew that the London and Bucharest Peace Conferences had not extinguished the Balkan fire, but had only covered it with ashes, under which it continued to smoulder, ready to flare up on the slightest provocation. Yet we all tried to believe in the reality of that temporary lull, and no one suspected that these smouldering embers would blaze up in the course of the next few months into a conflagration involving the whole world – a conflagration that would destroy one half of Europe and bring ruin to the other.

To the King's question concerning the possibility of a European war, I replied that I saw no danger unless Austria-Hungary attacked Serbia. I added that I had expressed myself frankly on the subject to Count Thurn, the Austro-Hungarian Ambassador in St. Petersburg, and to Count Pourtalès, the German Ambassador, begging them to inform the respective Governments of my words. The King seemed impressed by what I told him, and said: 'I hope Austria will not do it.'

My opinion as to the danger to European peace that might arise should Vienna attempt to crush the independence of Serbia left a somewhat lasting impression on the mind of the old King. At an audience given some days later to Count Czernin, the Austro-Hungarian Minister in Bucharest – later Minister for Foreign Affairs for a short time – the King repeated my remark to him word for word. In his memoirs, published in 1919 under the title *Im Weltkriege*, Count Czernin gives (page 117) a detailed description of this incident, of which he immediately informed the Viennese Government. His own commentary upon it displays the singular reasoning characteristic of Austro-Hungarian diplomats: he says that

when I spoke to King Charles, I was probably already aware of certain Serbian plots against the safety of Austria-Hungary.

The *Standart* remained twelve hours in the port of Constanza, and left in the evening for Odessa with all the Imperial Family on board. The King and the Royal Family saw them off, and cordial farewells were exchanged. I stayed a few days longer in Rumania, for M. Bratiano had invited me to come to Bucharest, in order to meet the other members of the Rumanian Government. I also wished to have a quiet, unofficial talk with our Minister there, M. Poklevsky, who had just been appointed.

On the following day I had lunch with the King in a small summer residence built at the end of the far-projecting pier, where Queen Elizabeth lived. She had not lost her poetical tastes with the coming of old age, and she loved to listen to the waves dashing against the pier. There was no political talk in the presence of the Royal ladies – we spoke of the past and made plans for the future. The aged Queen told us about her visits to Russia in her early youth, when she was the guest of her aunt, the Grand Duchess Elena Pavlovna. That remarkable woman has left a profound impression upon public life in Russia, owing to her part in the emancipation of the peasants, and to her patronage of Russian art and science in the first half of the reign of Alexander II. Speaking of the Grand Duchess, the Queen mentioned many of the most prominent men of that remarkable period, for whom the Mikhailovsky Palace had been a public and political centre, and many of whom I had known personally in my younger days. As to future plans, those were naturally made by the younger members of the Royal Family, chiefly by Princess Marie, wife of the Crown Prince, who talked, with her usual animation, of her proposed visit to the Crimea in the autumn. The Emperor and Empress had invited her, with her eldest son, to spend some time at Livadia, a place which interested her very much, as did the whole of that lovely country. This trip was never made, for September, 1914, saw the forcing of the Turkish Straits by two German warships, which entered the Black Sea and bombarded Odessa and several towns on the Crimean Coast. The war, which had already been raging for

six weeks on Russia's Western frontier, was thus carried over to the Southern front.

On the evening of June 2, I left for Bucharest with M. Bratiano, our Minister, M. Poklevsky, and Baron Schilling, chief of my Political Chancellery and my most confidential assistant, who usually accompanied me on my official journeys. In the course of two days spent in the Rumanian capital, I had several opportunities of conversing with M. Bratiano, who proved to be an interesting and sympathetic interlocutor, although he displayed more anxiety to obtain information than to impart it. In the tentative business conversations to which we confined ourselves at our first meeting I had to be equally reserved, and we could not therefore discuss any subject exhaustively. I managed, however, to obtain an idea of the Prime Minister's views. I could gather from our casual conversation that he was free from those prejudices which had, for so many years, prevented many of his compatriots from appraising at their true worth the advantages that a *rapprochement* with Russia could offer, in view of certain political events which were obviously drawing nearer every year. I could not doubt that he fully realized that the aged Austrian Emperor and the decrepit Hapsburg Monarchy were unreliable allies for young Rumania, impatiently awaiting the moment when she could advance her claim to a part of the Austrian succession; and M. Bratiano understood quite well that his country could only hope to receive this inheritance with the help of Russia. We could therefore even then count upon his support in our policy of reconciliation with Rumania. Certain other prominent political leaders were willing to meet our advances halfway, some because they agreed with Bratiano, and others because they were afraid of being forestalled by him.

The impression I gathered on my visit to Rumania determined our future policy towards that country – a policy which thenceforth never wavered from the course it had taken. We were still in the dark, however, as to how far we could rely on M. Bratiano, and those political leaders who seemed willing, from patriotic motives, to link their fate with ours. We did not possess sufficient information to enable us to judge of their moral calibre – a factor which is not less important in politics than in other branches of human activity. The Great War,

which was to throw so much light on this question, was still hidden from our sight, although the sands were swiftly running out.

On the day of my departure from Constanza, King Charles told me that he hoped I should be able to visit Sinaia, a summer resort of the Royal Family, situated in the Carpathians, close to the Hungarian frontier. In order to carry out the King's desire, and perhaps wishing to get to know me better, M. Bratiano offered to accompany me on this expedition. We visited the castle, a favourite residence of the King, built in a pretentious style and offering no artistic interest. Then, wishing to give me a better idea of the Carpathian landscape, with its magnificent forests, M. Bratiano took me to a place, whose name I now forget, lying on the Hungarian border. After stopping for a moment, our car rapidly crossed the frontier – to the mute astonishment of the sentry – and carried us for several miles into Hungarian territory. As we entered Transylvania, the same thought probably flashed into both our minds – namely, that this, too, was Rumanian territory, a country whose inhabitants still awaited deliverance from the Magyar yoke, and reunion with their brothers across the frontier. We did not, however, exchange these thoughts. The time for frank conversation had not yet arrived.

On the following day, the Buda-Pesth papers expressed their displeasure at my drive into Hungarian territory with M. Bratiano. I also learnt, later on, that our joint appearance in Transylvania had also been criticized by the Viennese authorities.

This excursion proved to be the first manifestation – though quite unpremeditated as such – of the growing friendship between Russia and Rumania.

CHAPTER VI

The wedding between the Kaiser's only daughter and the Duke of Brunswick – cousin to the Emperor Nicholas on his mother's side – took place in Berlin in May, 1913. All the bridegroom's near relatives were invited to the ceremony, including the Emperor of Russia and the King of England. I was informed of this by the German Ambassador, who asked me, at the same time, whether I thought the Emperor would accept the invitation. I replied that I knew nothing of his intentions. A few days later, the Emperor told me that he had received an invitation from the Kaiser to be present at his daughter's wedding, but had not, as yet, made up his mind whether he would accept it. The Empress in any case would not go to Berlin. 'This will hardly surprise you,' he added with a smile. The Empress's decision did not, in fact, surprise me, for I knew how little sympathy she had with her cousin Wilhelm, and how greatly she dreaded all official ceremonies at home, and even more abroad. 'I should like to go to Berlin,' said the Emperor, 'but it will be interpreted as a political action. A year ago, the Kaiser came to Baltic Port. Would not a second interview raise much idle talk?' I replied that if the interview of the two Emperors at Baltic Port had been of a political character, the same could hardly be said of a journey to Berlin on the occasion of a family wedding. I could easily inform the representatives of the Entente of this journey, explaining to them that it was a family affair, in which there would be no room for politics, and that I should therefore not accompany my Sovereign to Berlin. I knew that the Emperor wished to see his cousin, King George of England, for whom he entertained a warm friendship, and I thought it would be good for him to come in contact with the healthy atmosphere of the English Court. I knew, besides, that a prolonged stay at Tsarskoié-Sélo, in the abnormal seclusion to which he was doomed by the tenacious will of his ailing wife – to whose wishes he always gave way – had a depressing effect upon his nerves, in spite of his deep affection for his wife and children. I thought that a short journey abroad was bound to be good for him, as it would interrupt the dreary monotony of his life at home.

The Emperor went to Berlin and returned in a few days, looking very cheerful and pleased with his journey. Talking of his impressions, he told me that he had met with a very cordial reception in Germany, not only from the Court, but also from the public. He had been warmly welcomed and cheered when he drove with the Kaiser through the streets of Berlin. His innate modesty at first made him think that the cheering was meant for his host; but he afterwards noticed that it did not cease when he drove out alone, and this manifestation of friendliness greatly pleased him.

In discussing his conversations with Wilhelm II, the Emperor told me that the latter had mentioned, among other unimportant matters, that he was sending a new military mission, under General Liman von Sanders, to Constantinople at the request of the Turkish Government. He added that it was similar to previous missions of the same kind, which had for many years been sent to Turkey, and that he hoped the Emperor would have no objection to it. The latter replied that if this new mission did not differ from previous ones, he would, of course, have no objection.

This conversation, which seemed unimportant, made no impression on me at the time. Yet it served as a starting-point for a very sharp conflict with the Berlin Cabinet, when the true nature of this measure – adopted by the German Government under the inoffensive pretext of sending military instructors to Turkey at her own request – became known to us.

I have already mentioned the disappointment caused in Berlin by the victories of the Balkan Allies, in 1912, over the Turkish Army, whose military education had for many years past been entrusted to the German General von der Goltz. I remarked that the German General Staff had probably decided, there and then, to reorganize the Turkish military forces on a new basis. Germany's prestige in the Near East had suffered considerably when the war revealed the deficiencies, in training and equipment, of the Turkish Army. The conviction grew and took firm root in Berlin that in order to restore it, it was necessary for the German Military Mission to work out immediate reforms in the instruction of the Turkish troops. It was considered necessary to place German Generals

at the head of the Turkish military schools, and to appoint German advisers to the Turkish General Staff and Army Medical Department, in addition to those who continued their special instructional duties.

The detailed plans for this reorganization, which were not known to any foreign Government, were communicated to me, at the end of October, 1913, by M. de Giers, our Ambassador in Constantinople, who had obtained the information from a secret source. One can easily understand the impression produced upon me by this action of the German Government, which was evidently designed to enable it to take over the military administration of Constantinople; in other words, the German Government would be in a position to assume complete control of the Turkish capital, whenever it might consider such a move desirable. This unpleasant impression was further strengthened by the following fact. Some time before the German scheme became known to me, I passed through Berlin on my way from Vichy, where I had taken a three weeks' cure. As usual, I had an interview with the German Chancellor, and discussed in detail with him the latest political events. Among these, there was one, connected with the internal administration of the Turkish Empire, which should have led Bethmann-Hollweg to inform me of the steps contemplated by Germany. This was the question of the reforms in the Armenian Vilayets, which had been raised on my initiative, and just then formed the subject of an active interchange of views, between the Russian and German Governments. Nevertheless the Chancellor, in the course of our long conversation, omitted to mention the surprise which Germany was preparing for Europe – and above all for Russia – and I returned to St. Petersburg without any suspicion of the German plans.

When I received M. de Giers' telegram the German Ambassador was on leave, and the Councillor of the Embassy, M. von Lucius, was in charge of it. He told me that he knew nothing of the conditions under which the new military mission had been sent to Constantinople, but he would make inquiries, and inform me of the answer of his Government. Although von Lucius was not one of those who inspire unlimited confidence, even after a lengthy acquaintance, I nevertheless believed

what he said. I should equally have believed Count Pourtalès, had he been unable, in this case, to enlighten me as to the intentions of his Government, professing complete ignorance of them. I was well acquainted with the system of the German Foreign Office, of only informing its representatives abroad of its plans and intentions, in so far as was inevitable in view of some diplomatic step they would have to take. The very evasive reply received from Berlin in answer to von Lucius' inquiry convinced me, however, that the information communicated by M. de Giers was absolutely correct, and that General Liman von Sanders was not only to be entrusted with the rôle of Instructor-in-Chief to the Turkish troops, but was also to be in executive command of the First Turkish Corps, stationed at Constantinople. Our Ambassador in Berlin, M. Sverbeyer, was also unable to give me more detailed information concerning the Mission, about which very little was known, even at the Foreign Office.

My first interview with the German Ambassador, after his return from leave, was rather a stormy one. I could not refrain from frankly expressing the extremely disagreeable impression which the dispatch to Constantinople of General Liman von Sanders, invested with such unexpected powers, had produced upon me. I warned him of the consternation it would inevitably cause in Russian public opinion and in the press, as soon as it became generally known. I also expressed my astonishment at the fact that the German Chancellor did not inform me, in the course of our recent interview in Berlin, of the General's intended mission, which greatly exceeded the usual activities of foreign officers invited to take service with foreign States in need of outside assistance. I added that Berlin must surely realize that it was impossible for Russia to view with indifference such an event as the transfer of the command of the garrison of Constantinople to German hands. The Chancellor should know that if there was any point in the world upon which our attention was jealously concentrated, and where we could not permit any changes directly concerning our vital interests, that point was certainly Constantinople, which controlled our access to the Mediterranean – the natural outlet of the trade of Southern Russia. Count Pourtalès knew well enough what efforts I had made, ever since

my appointment as Minister for Foreign Affairs, to establish friendly relations with Germany. The Kaiser and the German Chancellor had always assured me that this was equally the desire of the German Government. Germany's conduct in the matter of the new military mission to Turkey was directly opposed to our conciliatory policy, and contradicted the asseverations of friendship I had just received from the Chancellor himself in Berlin. The path I had chosen was the only one that promised European peace; but the attitude of Germany made it a difficult path for me to pursue.

In answer to these observations, which he could not treat as unfounded, the German Ambassador declared that General Liman von Sanders' mission to Constantinople, and the conditions under which it was to be executed, belonged to the sphere of exclusively military affairs, and as such were under the control of the military authorities, and not of the Imperial Chancellor; they consequently had no political significance. Besides, according to Count Pourtalès, the question of the Turkish Mission had already been discussed by the two Emperors during the Tsar's recent visit to Berlin, and the latter had given it his full assent. I have already given the Emperor's account of this 'discussion,' and of the form in which he had assented to the new mission, and I now repeated his exact words to the Ambassador. Further wrangling with Count Pourtalès was evidently useless. Although sufficiently yielding by nature, he suffered from a defect inherent in many of his compatriots: he was impervious to the arguments of his opponent, reasoning from the point of view impressed upon him by his Prussian education, namely, that his Government was always in the right. He was inclined to forget that one of the most important functions of a diplomatic representative is to explain to his own Government the arguments and motives which may cause a foreign Government to hold different, and sometimes diametrically opposite views on a certain subject; in other words, he should be an interpreter of foreign opinion, and it is his duty to endeavour to reconcile these conflicting views, when circumstances demand it. When a diplomatic agent does not understand and fails to accomplish this extremely important part of his work, he cannot serve any useful purpose, and may, in times of serious international

complications, exercise a most unfortunate influence on events.

Under the circumstances, I decided to abandon the hopeless discussions in St. Petersburg, and endeavoured, by means of a direct appeal to Berlin, to obtain that those conditions of General Liman von Sanders' mission which were unacceptable to us should be cancelled, or at least in some degree modified. Besides instructing M. Sverbeyer, our Ambassador in Berlin, in that sense, I asked our Prime Minister, Count Kokovtzov, who was on leave abroad, to stop in Berlin on his way back to Russia, in order to explain to the Kaiser and the Imperial Chancellor in a personal interview the validity of our protest against the dispatch of General Liman von Sanders to Constantinople, on the basis proposed by the German General Staff. The important position held by Count Kokovtzov, and his personal qualities, made it quite natural to charge him with this mission.

Having received full powers from the Emperor, Count Kokovtzov willingly acceded to my request, and spared no effort to prove to the Kaiser how dangerous to our relations with Germany were such measures as the new military mission to Constantinople. He referred to the agitation it had produced in our public opinion and in the press, which considered – and not without reason – that if the command of the Turkish Army passed into German hands, this would be tantamount to establishing their actual control of the Turkish capital. Germany seemed to have been placed in an impasse by the rash conduct of the General Staff, which, as the Imperial Chancellor frankly admitted to Sir Edward Goschen, the British Ambassador in Berlin, had acted, in this case, without his knowledge and approval. In order to provide an escape from the situation, Count Kokovtzov made the following proposal to the Emperor: if it was considered impossible to return to the system of instruction by German officers which had existed in the Turkish army for twenty years – 'and which ended,' put in the Kaiser, 'in a complete fiasco for Germany' – he suggested that the German General should assume the command of a corps in some other town of the Turkish Empire, Adrianople for instance, or Smyrna, as M. Sverbeyer had proposed.

This conversation was carried on in a friendly tone, as was also Count Kokovtzov's interview with the Imperial Chancellor, who expressed his regret at having failed to inform me, when I passed through Berlin, of the step they were about to take. He attributed this omission to the fact that he looked upon General Liman von Sanders' mission as the logical outcome of previous missions of German officers to Turkey. Both the Kaiser and the Chancellor promised to give special consideration to the Russian Government's point of view; but at the same time they both expressed their astonishment at the agitation caused in Russia by the General's mission. It is difficult to say whether this astonishment was genuine or feigned; if it was genuine, such *naïveté* can be accounted for only by the peculiarities of German psychology.

The conversations which took place between our Ambassador and von Jagow, the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, and his assistant, M. Zimmermann, on the same subject, were of a less conciliatory nature, owing to the temperament of those two chief assistants of Bethmann-Hollweg, who were neither of them of an accommodating disposition. To M. Sverbeyer Herr von Jagow used a phrase to which he often had recourse when he found it difficult to extricate himself from some tangled situation: 'The matter has now gone too far to be altered.' I, too, frequently heard the same phrase on the lips of the German Ambassador, in the course of the anxious ten days that preceded the German declaration of war, during which I still believed that a warning energetically uttered by Germany might check Austria-Hungary's headlong rush towards the abyss of misery and disaster in which she was the first to perish, dragging after her the whole of Europe. In repeating these meaningless words, the German Foreign Office did not realize that they were either a confession of its inability to cope with the situation or else a disguised expression of German perfidy. They had evidently forgotten, in Berlin, that the first aim of political wisdom is to prevent events from creating an impossible situation, in which human will is powerless to govern, and there is nothing to be done but to fold one's arms and await disaster, and one's own turn to perish in the general wreck. It had not yet come to this, but the reckless disposition of the German military party, and the

passive attitude of the Higher Civil Administration, considerably hastened the approach of a catastrophe for Europe.

Meanwhile, Russian diplomacy was by no means idle, and our representatives in France and England endeavoured to persuade the Governments of these countries to adopt our point of view on the question of General Liman von Sanders' mission. This presented no difficulty, for their own political and commercial interests on the Bosphorus were equally involved in the danger that threatened Russia, should the military control of Constantinople pass into German hands. My conversation with Paris and London proceeded from the argument that an intolerable situation would ensue for the diplomatic representatives of the Triple Entente, if the Turkish garrison in the capital were placed under the command of a German General. Apart from the dignity of the Great Powers and the prestige of their representatives in the eyes of the Eastern population of Constantinople, there was the question of a possible sudden outbreak of rioting, such as had often occurred in Constantinople during the last few years. In case of friction between the two groups of Great European Powers, the Embassies of the Triple Entente might be placed in an embarrassing position, owing to their dependence on a German General. At best, and under normal political conditions, they would still be, so to speak, under his guardianship and protection. Neither of these alternatives was admissible.

We never intended to take any steps which might be interpreted in Berlin as an attempt to wound Germany's *amour propre* or to oblige her to cancel the appointment of her General in a manner inconsistent with the dignity of a Great Power. The other members of the Triple Entente shared our views on this point. Therefore, with the consent of their Governments, the negotiations conducted by their representatives in Berlin gave Germany every opportunity of revoking her rash decision without prejudice to her dignity. These negotiations lasted until the New Year, when the problem was solved in a manner acceptable to both parties. General Liman von Sanders was promoted to a rank incompatible with the duties of an Army-Corps Commander, while the command of the garrison of Constantinople passed into the hands of a Turkish General. Liman von Sanders was appointed Inspector of the Turkish

Army – a post which obviously did not reduce the extent of his control over it, and was therefore disagreeable and disadvantageous to Russia, even in this new and mitigated form. We could not, however, press for further concessions without risking a dangerous aggravation of our relations with Germany. The Young Turk Government, which aimed at liberating Turkey from foreign influence, yet pursued, at the same time, a course which could end only in political and military bondage to Germany. We watched with anxiety the gradual suppression of Turkish independence by Germany, foreseeing the consequences that were bound to follow. We did our utmost to prevent it, and to open the eyes of the Turks to the inevitable outcome – the complete subordination of the Turkish nation to the aims of German policy, and the loss of all independence. But the efforts of the Russian Government were fruitless. It was not in our power to force the Turks to throw off the millstone which the Germans had hung round their necks. The interests of the Young Turk Government had become so closely interwoven with those of Germany that it was impossible to separate them. The fate of Pan-Germanism and of Young Turkey were destined to be sealed on the same day.

The episode I have briefly described, which ended in our obtaining satisfaction in the letter, if not in the spirit, made one thing very clear. If there were people in Russia who still entertained any doubts as to the real aims of Germany's Near Eastern policy, the conditions under which General Liman von Sanders' mission was conceived and executed put an end to all uncertainty and misunderstanding on the subject. Constantinople was the most important point on the famous Hamburg-Bagdad line, about which a whole Pan-German literature had been produced, and widely circulated both in Germany and abroad. Innumerable works of this kind served as text-books for the subjects of Wilhelm II, and helped to complete their political education. Although the German Government repudiated any responsibility for this literature, the fundamental propositions of the *Welt-Politik* which Prince Bülow – more than any of his predecessors – had made the chief object of German aspirations, not only offered no contradiction to the teaching of Pan-German professors and publicists, but easily

found a place in the far-reaching scheme of their works. There was no formal collaboration, but there was unspoken sympathy and encouragement; while between the Government and a people brought up on the ideals of *Welt-Politik* as interpreted by the Pan-German press there was complete agreement upon ultimate aims. In order to realize the vast political scheme embodied in the phrase 'Hamburg-Bagdad,' it was necessary to lay hands upon Constantinople, which stood at the junction of Europe and Asia, and was designed by nature to be the nodal point of the immense commercial movements which would inevitably follow the inauguration of direct communication between the North Sea, Mesopotamia and the Persian Gulf. The political importance of Constantinople is self-evident, and there is no need to dwell upon it. In view of it, and of the old and well-known truth that economic considerations dictate policy, the German Government was compelled to turn its attention to the Turkish capital, and to consolidate its influence there before other Powers offered any serious competition. The fact that the Young Turk Cabinet of Talaat and Enver Pasha was in office presented a most favourable opportunity for the execution of this plan – an opportunity which might not recur and which Germany felt bound to seize without delay. The necessity of atoning for the failure of previous military missions by dispatching a fresh one was a fortunate coincidence, and besides the reorganization of the Turkish Army, General Liman von Sanders was entrusted with the task of firmly establishing German influence in the Turkish Empire.

Russian policy with regard to Constantinople and the Straits had been inspired for a great many years by one fundamental principle: the maintenance of the *status quo* – however disadvantageous it might be, in many respects, for Russia. If any change could possibly be permitted, it must be on the express condition that Russia's vital interests should be fully guaranteed. No compromise could be accepted on this crucial point of Russian politics; and should an attack be made upon the Straits, Russia would be compelled to depart from her peaceful policy, although this was best suited to the needs of the State and the interests of her people.

From the day when Germany first laid hands on Constanti-

nople, Russia felt uneasy. There was no need to fear a *coup de main*, for the forces that Germany could dispose of in Turkey were insufficient for such an enterprise; but there was always the possibility that she might seize the opportunity afforded by political disturbances, always likely to happen in the Near East, to sweep away the last remnants of Turkish power over the Straits. The external safety of the Ottoman Empire seemed doubtful after the Balkan wars, while owing to the obvious inability of the Young Turks to establish any order based on sounder principles than terrorism, the internal situation was still more unreliable. The formidable symptoms of Turkey's approaching disintegration – which German Imperialism had foreseen, and was ready to take advantage of – obliged Russia to consider the measures to which she might at any time have to resort in defence of her own safety. Late in the autumn of 1913, I applied for the Emperor's permission to summon a conference during the winter, in which the Minister of Marine and the Chief of the General Staff with their principal assistants, our Ambassador in Constantinople, and several of my own assistants at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs would take part. The object of this conference was to determine the measures which the Russian Government would have to adopt, should circumstances oblige Russia to resort to military action with the Straits as objective. The conference took place under my presidency on February 8, 1914. The exchange of views between its members made it clear that they considered an offensive against Constantinople inevitable, should a European war break out. The question of mobilization, our sea and land transport, the expansion of our ship-building programme, the extension of our railway system, and similar problems therefore received special attention at the conference. It was once more made clear that we did not possess the means to take swift and decisive action, and that years would elapse before we were in a position to execute the plans we had in view. The minutes of the conference were drawn up and submitted to the Emperor.

I left the conference greatly depressed, for it had clearly revealed the deficiencies of our military organization. I had a conviction that, although we were able to foresee events, it was not in our power to avert them. There was a great gulf

between the determination of our aims and their attainment. That had always been Russia's greatest misfortune.

A few days after the conference, notwithstanding its secrecy, its deliberations became known at the German Embassy. The German Intelligence Service was well organized, and the Government generally received prompt information through its secret agents. The conclusions drawn from that information were, however, often far from correct. In the present case, for instance, our February conference was represented in Berlin as a plot against the integrity of the Ottoman Empire and a threat to European peace. It was depicted as such in the numerous more or less official publications that relate to the period preceding the Great War, and as such it remains, to the present day, in the imagination of the great majority of Germans who take an interest in foreign politics. German writers point to the conference of February 8 as a proof that Russia deliberately instigated the war, which she is supposed to have provoked in order to obtain possession of Constantinople and the Straits. The Bolsheviks, who rendered the old Russian diplomacy a great service by publishing the so-called 'secret' documents of the Imperial Ministry of Foreign Affairs – and so revealing the peaceful character of our policy – published, among other papers, the minutes of this conference. Any unbiassed reader can easily see the true significance of the measures which were discussed on that occasion. They were wholly defensive, and their object was to avert from Russia the gravest danger that could threaten her existence as a Great Power. Our Western Allies and friends were also aware of the danger that threatened them from Germany in the Near East, although perhaps they were less conscious of it than we. The immediate consequence was a strengthening of the ties between the Powers of the Triple Entente for the defence of their common interests against the predatory tendencies of Germany, definitely disclosed by General von Sanders' mission.

Our relations with our Ally France were based on solid pacts and treaties, which included, after the signing of the Naval Convention of 1912, the whole of the defensive measures foreseen by our Treaty of Alliance. They needed no completion or development at the beginning of 1914. There was

nothing to do but await the coming of those fatal events, in prevision of which Russia and France had formed their alliance, and which alone could test its expediency and practical utility.

With regard to England, the situation was entirely different. There existed no tie of any kind between us, except the Convention of 1907, which did not refer to Europe, and a growing feeling, in the years immediately preceding the war, of our community of interests in face of the danger that threatened from the Central Powers. Germany's *Welt-Politik*, conducted with extraordinary energy and by all possible methods, frequently found expression in imprudent official utterances; and these could hardly be reconciled with the existence of independent States on the continent of Europe, still less with the existence of great Empires, spreading far beyond the limits of Europe and possessing vast territories in other parts of the world. There were three such States in Europe: England, Russia, and France. This fact explains the origin and development of the idea of the Triple Entente, and its transformation into the kernel of the greatest political alliance known in the history of mankind. Germany was inevitably destined to come into conflict with this alliance, not in order to defend her existence – which was not threatened – but to execute her gigantic plan of world-domination.

The appearance of German officers on the Bosphorus, armed with unusual powers, was the decisive moment which prompted Russia to seek an understanding with England, more definite than the vague sense of common danger. It seemed evident to the Russian Government that if certain events took place which had already become political possibilities, our alliance with France, whose naval forces did not exceed our own, could no longer be regarded as a sufficient guarantee of our interests in the Near East. England alone could give us that help which, in every protracted struggle, turns the scale in favour of the nation which has command of the seas. Russia was convinced of this, and of the fact that a war with Germany, which seemed more and more imminent, would extend far beyond the limits of a struggle on the frontiers of Russia and France. If a formal alliance with England was out of the question – her nearest neighbour,

France, had been unable to conclude one with her – the Imperial Government wished at least to come to some agreement which would provide that, in certain contingencies, we might hope to receive assistance, not fortuitously, but as the result of a plan previously elaborated in common. Such an agreement might have taken the form of a conditional military convention similar to that which was signed between the French and British Staffs in November, 1913, with a view to eventual military action against Germany should the French and English Governments consider such action necessary. An agreement of this kind would have no political significance whatever.

The spring of 1914 was a rather anxious time with regard to the situation in the Black Sea. The Turkish Government showed a serious desire to put its naval forces in order, and accordingly invited Admiral Limpus and several British naval officers to take command of the Turkish Fleet. The British stipulated, however, that they should not be obliged to take part in any war operations with the Fleet. The control which English officers were given over the Turkish naval forces was officially interpreted in Berlin as justifying the appointment of General Liman von Sanders and other German officers to command different units of the Turkish Army. The analogy between these two cases was, of course, quite illusory. The Turkish Navy was in no way comparable with the Turkish Army as a fighting force; and in any case our friendly relations with England would guarantee that Admiral Limpus' reorganization of the Navy would aim at nothing prejudicial to our interests. Nevertheless, the possible reinforcement of the Turkish Fleet caused our naval authorities some anxiety, especially as they knew that the Turkish Government had placed several important orders with English shipbuilding firms, and that serious efforts were being made, in Constantinople, to acquire warships of considerable power from one of the South American States. These plans threatened to disturb the balance of naval forces in the Black Sea, and to place us at a disadvantage, as the Russian Dreadnoughts under construction at Nikolaev and Kherson could not be put in commission for some time.

Under these circumstances, a naval convention with Eng-

land was greatly to be desired. The arrival in Paris, in May, 1914, of the King and Queen of England, accompanied by Sir Edward Grey, led to a tentative interchange of views between the French and English Ministers and our Ambassador, M. Isvolsky, concerning the possibility of a convention between Russia and England, similar to the Anglo-French agreement described above. These discussions only amounted to a preliminary exploration of the ground. Should a favourable answer be received from Sir Edward Grey, the negotiations were to be transferred to London and carried on between Count Benckendorff and the British Government.

Much as I valued our political alliance with France, and the friendly relations established in 1907 with England – which subsequently led to the formation of the Triple Entente – I could not but realize the inadequacy of our political situation from the point of view of the peace of Europe. The complete solidarity of German and Austro-Hungarian interests in the Balkans and in the whole of the Near East had first been revealed at the time of the annexation of Bosnia and Herzegovina, which the German Government had openly supported in the ultimatum of 1909. This solidarity was now becoming more and more apparent, and the danger of a European conflict appeared to me to increase in proportion. I felt daily more convinced of the necessity of transforming the Triple Entente into a Triple Alliance, which seemed to be the only possible counterpoise to the Triple Alliance of the Central Powers. I contemplated such an alliance between Russia, France and England, based on purely defensive principles and guaranteeing Europe against the perpetual danger created by the reckless activities of unscrupulous Austro-Hungarian politicians and the ambitious designs of Pan-Germanism. In my opinion, this new Triple Alliance should by no means take the form of a secret agreement; it should be made public on the very day of its signature, in order to inform the European Governments and public opinion of its true significance, thus avoiding any false interpretation of its aims.

It was unfortunately impossible to open direct negotiations on the subject with our partners in the Entente, for I felt certain that failure was inevitable, in spite of the sympathetic attitude of France on this question. Nevertheless, I did not

conceal from the representatives of France and England my views as to the inadequacy of the Triple Entente, under the conditions of dangerous world-competition which had prevailed in Europe since the German designs for continental supremacy had been so clearly manifested. They agreed with me in theory, but considered my project impracticable, any attempt to induce England to abandon her inveterate prejudice against European alliances being doomed to failure.

A letter that I wrote to M. Isvolsky in March, 1914, with regard to his suggestion that we should seize the opportunity offered by the visit of the English King and Queen and Sir Edward Grey to Paris, for an exchange of views on a naval convention between Russia and England, contains the following passage, which I quote here because it expresses, in a few words, my views upon the necessity of a closer tie between the Entente Powers: 'I consider it my duty to tell you, that I regard the further development and reinforcement of the so-called Triple Entente, and its transformation into a Triple Alliance, as our most urgent political task. Since none of these Powers harbours any imperialistic designs, an alliance of this kind would be no menace to anyone; while on the other hand it would fully guarantee the international position of Russia, France and England.'

The outcome of the conversations in Paris, between MM. Poincaré and Doumergue, Sir Edward Grey and M. Isvolsky, was that England agreed in principle to a naval convention with Russia, similar to her convention with France. The British Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs declared himself willing to submit the question to the British Cabinet, and subsequently to open negotiations with the Russian Ambassador in London, assisted by technical advisers from the Admiralty, and by the Russian Naval Attaché in London.

The question thus seemed to be in a fair way to settlement, and our Naval Attaché, Captain Volkov, received the necessary instructions from St. Petersburg. The British Government intended to send Admiral of the Fleet Prince Louis of Battenberg – who had married the eldest sister of the Empress Alexandra Fedorovna – to St. Petersburg with full powers to sign the convention. It was thought that the Prince's visit to Russia would not arouse the attention of the Press or the

suspicions of foreign Governments, owing to his close relationship with the Empress.

These events occurred in the last days of May, 1914. The Prince was expected in St. Petersburg in August; but by the 1st of August the storm which not only swept away millions of human lives, but overthrew powerful thrones and shook great Empires to their foundation, was already raging over the greater part of Europe.

CHAPTER VII

In the spring of 1914, the Court spent about two months in Livadia. The Imperial Family visited the Crimea every year, and sometimes twice a year, if the health of the Tsesarevich required it. He underwent a treatment of mud-baths on the sunlit terrace of the Palace of Livadia. This treatment, combined with the warm sea air, had a beneficial effect on his general health and on the symptoms of the organic disease from which he suffered. The Emperor and Empress consequently always remained as long as possible in the South. The health of their only son was the object of their constant care, and although they bore with fortitude their secret but ever-present fear that he might succumb, it threw a dark shadow on their otherwise cloudless family life. The Tsesarevich felt better and stronger under the influence of the mild climate of the Crimea, and his parents forgot, for a time, their acute anxiety for their son and heir, and began to hope that they might, after all, see him grow up and attain manhood, even though he might never be very strong and healthy.

According to an ancient custom, the Sultans of Turkey were wont to dispatch a special Embassy of greeting to the Crimea, when the Russian Court was staying there for some considerable time.

In May, 1914, the Sultan Makhmoud V dispatched his Minister of the Interior, Talaat Bey, and General Izzet Pasha, to Yalta with this object. I arrived in Livadia at the same time. The Ambassadors spent two days in the Crimea, and I passed nearly all my time in their company. This gave me an opportunity of becoming acquainted with Talaat Bey, who was – I think I may say without exaggeration – the most infamous figure of our time.

Our Ambassador in Constantinople, M. de Giers, who had also arrived in Yalta, knew Talaat well, owing to his official relations with the Young Turk Government, in which Talaat played a rôle at least as important as that of the War Minister, the notorious Enver Pasha. He warned me not to believe a word of anything Talaat might say. This warning confirmed all I had heard about him from other sources, and I therefore hoped he would be as reserved as possible with me. Neverthe-

less he interested me, especially at that time; for I wished to become acquainted – if only superficially – with the man upon whose good- or ill-will depended the fate of the Armenian reforms, recently inaugurated at the instance of the Russian Government, and to the success of which I attached great importance.

In outward appearance, Talaat gave the impression of a pure-bred Turanian. He was of medium height, and strongly built, with a flat face and prominent cheek-bones, a low forehead and intelligent, restless brown eyes, which strove to assume an amiable expression. His companion, Izzet Pasha, seemed to care very little what impression he produced upon strangers in new surroundings, and exhibited that indifference, peculiar to Orientals, which often predisposes Europeans in their favour.

I was present at their reception at the Palace of Livadia, and watched the impression produced upon Talaat Bey by the simplicity of bearing and manner so characteristic of the Emperor. The features of Izzet Pasha revealed nothing but the calm deference of an Oriental in the presence of earthly grandeur; but the more mobile and expressive countenance of Talaat Bey showed traces of a certain shyness, such as moral inferiors often display when they happen so find themselves in good society.

To the Ambassadors' greeting, the Emperor replied that he was glad to see a Turkish Embassy in Livadia, for he entertained the most friendly feelings for the Sultan and the Turkish nation; and he expressed sincere wishes for their welfare. The Emperor further said that he sought no favours from the Turkish Government, and only expected the Turks to remain masters in their own country and not to allow strangers to gain complete control of it. This would be the best guarantee, in his opinion, of good and friendly relations between Russia and the Ottoman Empire.

The Emperor confined himself to this hint – which was, of course, fully appreciated by the Ambassadors – of the displeasure caused in Russia by the extraordinary powers granted to the military mission of General Liman von Sanders. In my conversations with the Ambassadors, I returned to the subject, and expressed my opinion very frankly as to the

danger to Turkey's own interests in allowing foreign authority to establish itself in this way. Turkey ran the risk of losing the power of self-determination and of finding herself in a position bordering on vassalage to Germany.

All that M. de Giers had written and said to me, and all I had heard from other sources of Talaat and the rest of the Young Turks, indicated that although their ambitions were not kept in check by any moral scruples, yet they were staunch patriots in their own way. They had endeavoured to throw off the numerous limitations of their political power which resulted from their age-long struggle with Christian Europe. I hoped that my arguments would have some effect on the Ambassadors, in case they were not yet definitely bound to Germany by considerations of personal advantage; I was unaware, at the time, whether this was already so or not. I had another, more weighty, argument to put forward, which always had its due effect upon the Turkish Government – namely, a veiled threat of reprisals by Russia; this the Turks feared above all, for they regarded Russia as their most dangerous enemy. I could only use this argument in a very cautious manner, for it was a double-edged weapon, and had consequently to be wielded with the greatest circumspection. At the present moment, moreover, the closer union between Germany and Turkey – which had just found such vivid expression in the mission of General Liman von Sanders to Constantinople – gave the Turks more reason than ever to count upon the support of the German Government, should strong pressure be applied by Russia. As I have said before, our friends and Allies had their own aims to pursue, and their assistance in Constantinople could not be absolutely relied upon. This left us absolutely isolated – a situation of which the Turkish Government was well aware. It only remained, then, to have recourse to persuasion – a very inadequate weapon, utterly unsuitable for dealing with an Oriental nation. A more effectual method would have been to increase our troops on the frontier of Asia Minor; but the mere possibility of such a measure – even if it were quite devoid of aggressive intention – caused the greatest anxiety to the French and British Governments. We were therefore obliged to reserve it in case of the complete failure of the negotiations in which we were then

engaged, in conjunction with Germany, with the Turkish Government, regarding the long-promised reforms in the Armenian vilayets. In the present instance, moreover, it would have been impracticable because, being directed against Germany as much as against Turkey, it might have led to a European war. Besides, the question of the German military mission had already become less acute. Our immediate task was therefore to paralyse, as it were, General Liman von Sanders' mission, and so avert the possibility of its further development in a sense unfavourable to Russia.

Political conversation with Talaat and Izzet was far from easy. They listened very attentively to all that was said, but expressed no opinion of their own, pleading complete ignorance of everything relating to foreign politics, which they pretended were directed by the Grand-Vizier, Said Halim. We knew well enough, however, that the latter took no part whatever in the Government, where everything was decided by Talaat, Enver and Djemal – the heads of the 'Party of Union and Progress.'

On the question of the Armenian reforms, which was, as I have said, very important in view of its significance for the large Armenian population of our border provinces, Talaat Bey was, if possible, even more prudent and reserved than on that of the German military mission. The pressure that Russia had exerted to secure reforms in the Armenian vilayets was particularly unwelcome to the Young Turk Government, which regarded it as an attempt on Turkish independence. I could not, therefore, count on any sympathy from the Young Turks, who nourished hatred and inveterate suspicion of their Armenian compatriots. I could only hope that my conversations with Talaat might impress upon him the fact that we regarded the Armenian question very seriously, and were resolved to insist unwaveringly upon the execution of our scheme of reforms, whose object was to guarantee the conditions of civilized existence to the Turkish Armenians.

I cannot say whether my arguments had the desired effect on Talaat, or whether they helped to persuade him of the danger of a conflict with Russia, which was bound to arise sooner or later, if the Turks did not resume an independent national policy, and repudiate their dependence on orders and

indications from Berlin. The few words he uttered in reply were friendly enough, and seemed to reveal a desire to take our warnings to heart; but it was difficult to determine how far they were sincere. The moral character of the man inclined me to believe that it was even more difficult to obtain the truth from him in Livadia, where he was bound to feel a certain restraint, than in other surroundings, where he would have felt more free to give vent to the cynicism that made him an object of terror and hatred to his own countrymen. There was no time for political analysis, and I could only judge Talaat by the information which I possessed.

On the day of their departure, Talaat and Izzet invited myself and my assistants, and several members of the Emperor's retinue, to dinner on the Sultan's yacht, anchored at Yalta. In the course of this dinner Talaat, who sat next to me, spoke very little and seemed preoccupied. After dinner, when I was already thinking of returning on shore, he bent down and said in a whisper, so as not to be overheard by anyone: 'I have to make you a very serious proposal: would the Russian Government care to conclude an alliance with Turkey?' I confess that I was taken by surprise. I expected anything rather than the suggestion of an alliance with Turkey. Trying to conceal my astonishment, I asked him: 'Why did you leave this proposal until the last moment, when you had so many opportunities to make it before?' Talaat answered that there was, of course, no time to deliberate on it now, but that he simply wished to know what I thought of the possibility of such an alliance. I told him that our Ambassador in Constantinople would return three days later to his post, and that the only thing I could do was to instruct him to discuss there the Turkish proposal; I did not reject it in principle, but I considered that such an important matter required very serious discussion. On this point Talaat evidently agreed with me.

On my return home, I told M. de Giers of Talaat's unexpected proposal, which neither he nor the other Russian guests on the Sultan's yacht had heard: he had been sitting next to Izzet Pasha at dinner.

M. de Giers, who was well acquainted with the peculiar political atmosphere of Constantinople – an atmosphere to

which it takes some time to grow accustomed – did not conceal from me his astonishment at Talaat Bey's proposal and at the manner in which it had been made. He told me, however, that he could not dismiss it as unworthy of attention, for he knew that some members of the Young Turk party were inclined to seek a guarantee of national independence in an understanding with Russia. They were impatient of the increasing dependence of their Government on Berlin, and would welcome a different orientation of Turkish policy, which might liberate their country from German tutelage. M. de Giers did not think it improbable that Talaat was beginning, for one reason or another, to realize the disadvantages of this tutelage, and had bethought him of an alliance with Russia, as offering a means of escape. All this could only be ascertained on the spot, and he intended to explore the question thoroughly on his return to Constantinople.

I remained in the Crimea for a few days after the departure of the Turkish Embassy, and then returned to St. Petersburg to await M. de Giers' solution of the Turkish enigma. Some time elapsed before I received any news from him, and when I did, his letters made it clear that it would be useless to expect a continuation of the conversation on the subject of an alliance with Russia so unexpectedly introduced by the Turks. The Young Turk Cabinet, frightened at the boldness of its own proposal, had evidently decided to abandon the plan contemplated by Talaat. It may also be that the German Embassy, having learnt of his attempt to find a counterpoise to German influence in an alliance with Russia, had promptly put an end to all such aspirations. There is no doubt, however – and this has been confirmed from other sources – that the Young Turks hesitated before linking their fate with that of Germany; but the German Ambassador, Baron von Wangenheim, and the military mission of General Liman von Sanders, finally succeeded in convincing them of her invincible might. Enver Pasha, the Minister for War, who had enjoyed the special favour of the Kaiser during his long stay in Berlin, and the numerous pro-Germans to be found in Turkish military circles, believed still more blindly in her power.

I have already said that in the course of my conversations with the Turkish Ambassadors, I discussed, among other

questions, that of the proposed reforms of the Armenian vilayets of Asia Minor. The struggle between the political influence of Russia and Germany in relation to their interests in the Near East could be clearly traced in this question. I feel I must here devote a few words to the complicated question of the fate of the Armenian population of the Ottoman Empire, and to the Russian Government's efforts to obtain tolerable conditions of life for this Christian people.

Like the Jews, the Armenians offer a rare example of a nation with no territory of its own. The mountainous country which bears the historical name of Armenia, and which was the cradle of the Armenian race, long ago ceased to be the home of more than an insignificant fraction of it. This fraction was still further reduced by the terrible massacre of the Armenians by the Turks in 1895 and during the Great War of 1914. But even before these dreadful events took place, the Armenians – except in certain towns – never constituted a majority of the local population, either in 'Russian Armenia' or in the Turkish vilayets on the other side of the frontier.

The history of the Armenian people, from the thirteenth century onwards, is a history of martyrdom. At this time they fell under the domination of the Seljuks, and later, of the Mongols and the Persians alternately, until at last, after the creation of the Ottoman Empire in the fourteenth century, they were given into serfdom to the Kurdish feudal landowners. Terrible as is the history of all the Christian nations which fell under the yoke of the Turks, none suffered like the Armenians. Their fate was all the more tragic because they had no hope of ever throwing off the barbarian yoke and organizing their existence on a basis of national independence. They lacked the chief condition of such independence – a territory of their own. The most enterprising among them dispersed, and thanks to their industry and commercial instincts, soon created for themselves a quite tolerable position, even within the limits of the Turkish Empire. In many cases, they attained riches and power. The fate of those Armenians who lived in the provinces annexed by Russia after her numerous victories over Turkey and Persia may be regarded as enviable. Notwithstanding some transitory acts of bureaucratic intolerance, such, for instance, as certain restrictions on their

ecclesiastical administration, or on the free disposal of their church property – due to a suspicion that they might use it for revolutionary purposes – Armenians enjoyed the protection of the law, and full civil rights throughout the Empire. In many towns of South-Eastern Russia, they became very prosperous, and filled important posts in the municipal administration; their prosperity sometimes provoked feelings of hostility on the part of other less fortunate residents.

This description applies only to those Armenians who had settled in foreign countries and had been naturalized; or, at best, to those who, although remaining in Turkey, had established themselves solidly as business men in Constantinople or the more or less important towns of European and Asiatic Turkey. Many of the latter, owing to the fact that they belonged to the Armenian-Catholic Church, enjoyed the protection of the Embassies and Consulates of Roman-Catholic countries, an invaluable privilege at the time of Armenian persecutions.

As to the mass of the rural population, which remained in the so-called Armenian vilayets, their fate showed no improvement under successive Governments; on the contrary, it became more and more intolerable. Although their tragic history had taught the Armenians to be patient, there was a limit even to their endurance. Deprived of all human rights, and subjected to the cruel despotism of the Turkish authorities and the Kurdish landowners on whose estates they toiled like slaves, they were in a perpetual ferment of discontent, which the revolutionary organizations that flourished, as always, in the soil of persecution and resentment, naturally exploited for their own ends. Several groups of these revolutionary organizations, known as 'Dashnaktzutiun,' existed in Russian Transcaucasia, and had agents in all the centres of Armenian population beyond the frontier. The Russian Government was aware of the existence of these societies, and watched their doings with anxiety, for traces of their activities were apparent within the borders of Russia, among our own Armenian population. It was, in fact, very difficult to discern whether the propaganda of the 'Dashnaktzutiun' was directed against Turkey, or designed to foment a revolution at home.

A revolt of the Armenians in the vilayets of Asia Minor,

bordering upon Transcaucasia, was always possible in view of the intolerable conditions of life there. Such a rising threatened to set fire to our own border provinces, where the numerous wealthy Armenians might be expected to lend active help to their brothers in the struggle against their Turkish oppressors.

Transcaucasia, with its varied and not over-peaceful population, was dangerous ground for any kind of disturbance, and the local administration feared nothing more than to see the Turkish border provinces become the theatre of an armed rebellion. Needless to say, such a rebellion would almost inevitably have led to war between Russia and Turkey – a development that the Government wished at all costs to avoid.

These observations will make it clear that, apart from a purely humanitarian interest in the fate of an unfortunate Christian people, the desire to maintain order in the most restless of our border provinces obliged the Imperial Government to take the initiative in negotiating for the introduction of radical reforms in the Armenian vilayets. It had decided to undertake these negotiations, because Russia was the country chiefly interested in their success, and because we knew very well that none of the other Powers would care to risk their friendly relations with Turkey by raising the question of Armenian reforms – a subject most distasteful to the Porte. These reforms had several times been drafted, and by Clause 61 of the Treaty of Berlin, Turkey, under pressure from the Great Powers, had definitely undertaken to fulfil them, but owing to the inveterate dilatoriness of the Turkish Government, no attempt had ever been made to execute them.

I could foresee that Russia's action would provoke the displeasure and suspicion of the Berlin Cabinet, which was gradually assuming the rôle of official protector of Islam. Having no wish further to complicate the intricate Armenian question, at the end of May, 1913, I instructed our Ambassador in Berlin, M. Sverbeyer, to inform the German Government of our intention to take the matter in hand, and to press for the execution of these reforms, in the spirit of the provisions of the Treaty of Berlin and the Turkish Law of 1895. The latter had been passed under pressure from the Powers of the Triple Entente, after the Armenian massacres of that year, but had

always remained a dead letter. M. Sverbeyer was instructed to explain, at the same time, that we wished to avoid any kind of rivalry, and hoped to unite the two groups of European Powers in a common effort to ameliorate the lot of the Armenians in Turkey, by means of reasonable and just reforms. In taking the initiative in this question, the Imperial Government had no thought of interfering with the lawful rights of Turkey; we only wished to prevent, in our common interest, the possibility of dangerous disturbances on our frontiers.

The French and British Governments sympathized with my offer and gave their representatives corresponding instructions. The Ambassadors of the Triple Alliance also received permission to take part in the deliberations on the proposed reforms, on the following conditions: (1) the maintenance of the sovereign rights of the Sultan over Armenia, and (2) the representation of Turkey at the Conference.

Having fulfilled his mission, our Ambassador informed me that the German Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs did not sympathize with our views, although he could not but own that the news which reached Berlin from the Armenian vilayets was far from reassuring. He added, however, that it was not always possible closely to examine these reports. He considered the question of the reforms very complicated and delicate, and thought that in many cases the Armenians themselves were to blame. Besides, in thinking of the Armenians, the Powers ought not to lose sight of the interests of the Kurds. In the opinion of our Ambassador, Herr von Jagow's displeasure was due to the fact that the German Government itself hoped to raise the question of the Armenian reforms, and could not, therefore, be pleased to see itself forestalled in that intention. The explanation of this sudden and unexpected interest on the part of Germany was not far to seek: while fearing to irritate the Turks by demanding too radical reforms, the Berlin Cabinet was not averse from the idea of making itself popular with the Armenians, who, being good business men, were most important factors in the economic life of the Turkish Empire.

The Russian *démarche* in the matter of the Armenian reforms at once altered the views of German diplomacy on the subject. Instead of favouring the reforms, Germany tried to prove to the Armenians that without her aid and support they

would never attain the fulfilment of their hopes and desires. She further set about obstructing the passage of the reforms by informing the Grand Vizier of the proposed Russian action.

An international commission was, however, appointed to deal with the question, and met in Constantinople, at the Austro-Hungarian Embassy at Yeni-Keuy. The scheme of reforms, drawn up at our Ambassador's request by the first dragoman of the Russian Embassy, M. Mandelstamm, was placed before the Commission at the end of June. The principal features of the Russian project were as follows. The six so-called Armenian vilayets were to form one province for administrative purposes, under a Christian Governor-General, appointed by the Sultan, with the consent of the Great Powers, for the term of five years. All executive powers were to be centred in his hands. A provincial assembly, elected on equal terms by Christians and Mussulmans, was to be given power to legislate on all questions of local importance. The laws drawn up by this assembly were to be ratified or rejected by the Sultan. Administrative Councils, composed of equal numbers of Christians and Mussulmans, elected by the population, were proposed for the vilayets and sandjaks. From the point of view of religious freedom, justice, education, landownership and tenure, and taxation, the Russian project offered sufficient guarantees to the Armenians, the principal one being that the execution of the clauses outlined above was to be under the control of the Great Powers.

At the first meeting of the Commission, it became apparent that its work was doomed to failure. It was clearly impossible to reconcile the Russian project, supported by France and England, with the demands of Germany and her Austro-Hungarian Ally, whose aims were incompatible with it. All the subsequent sittings of the Commission ended in futile discussions. This was very depressing for those of its members who took their task seriously, and were anxious to prevent, by means of timely reforms, the possibility of fresh bloodshed in a country whose native population was periodically exposed to merciless extermination. A few days after the Commission had begun its work, the Russian Government received, through the German Embassy in St. Petersburg, a note in which the substance of the Russian project was criticized,

and which ended by expressing the desire that the Powers 'should give equal consideration to the wishes of Turkey in the matter of Armenian reforms.'

After eight sittings, the Yeni-Keuy Commission was obliged to suspend its work. Each clause of the Russian project was actively opposed by the German representatives, whose innumerable amendments finally deprived it of all value. It was time to put an end to this unseemly comedy.

Meanwhile the situation in the Armenian vilayets had not improved. The Ambassadors of the Great Powers received daily reports from their Consuls on the spot, informing them of the ceaseless oppression and violence of Turks and Kurds. The Turkish Government, far from checking this lawlessness, secretly encouraged it, and the German Ambassador in Constantinople treated it with total indifference.

The Yeni-Keuy Commission had failed; but the Russian Government refused to yield to this rebuff, and decided to seek other means of establishing European control over the Turkish administration of the Armenian vilayets.

With this object, I thought it best to instruct our Ambassador in Constantinople to come to an agreement with the German Ambassador, Baron von Wangenheim, on a programme of indispensable reforms. Such a programme was elaborated – not without difficulty – and consisted of the following clauses: Instead of forming one province, the Armenian vilayets were separated into two, with an Inspector-General, appointed by the Sultan, at the head of each. The Inspector-General was to be chosen, on the recommendation of the Powers, from among the Christian foreign subjects of Turkey, and was to be invested with the power of dismissing all officials, of appointing new ones independently to posts of secondary importance, and of presenting candidates – whose appointment required the approval of the Sultan – to the higher administrative and judicial posts. An Assembly was to be created in each province, composed of an equal number of local Christians and Mussulmans. The Powers were to have the right to supervise the execution of these reforms, through the medium of their Ambassadors in Constantinople and their local Consular agents. The Porte also declared its intention of coming to an agreement with the Powers with regard to

further reforms in these vilayets.[1] These clauses were accepted by the Powers without any objections.

Although the programme of reforms was considerably curtailed in the new Russo-German text, it yet seemed acceptable to the Russian Government, as even in this new and imperfect form it introduced considerable improvements in the status of the Armenian subjects of Turkey. I regarded the acceptance by the Porte of the principle of European control over the actions of the Turkish administration as more essential than the detailed elaboration of individual clauses of administrative reform, which, when applied, even under the most favourable conditions, might easily lead to discussions and disputes between the Porte and the Powers. In spite of its defects, this abbreviated programme fulfilled our chief aim, inasmuch as it put an end to the uncontrolled activity of the coarse and corrupt Turkish administration in the Armenian vilayets, and the unbridled lawlessness of the local Mussulman population. This project was the first step towards making a civilized existence possible for the unfortunate Christian population, which had been forced to live, for centuries, under conditions contrary to all human and divine laws. This first step would inevitably be followed by others, and I hoped to see the Armenians emerge at last into a more peaceful existence, free from all threat of violence.

We now know that these hopes and dreams were not destined to be fulfilled; instead of the expected deliverance, the Armenian people were doomed to add an immense share of suffering to the general mass of calamities caused by the Great War.

In spite of the undisguised ill-will which the Turkish Government displayed towards the modest scheme of reform to which Russian diplomacy had succeeded in obtaining the consent of the German Government, and of the difficulties and obstacles which this ill-will created, the Russian Chargé d'Affaires, M. Goulkévich, was at last able to bring the question to a successful issue. At the beginning of 1914, he signed an agreement with the Grand Vizier, the text of which was thereupon communicated to all the Great Powers.

[1] A. N. Mandelstamm. *Le Sort de l'Empire Ottoman.* Payot. Paris, 1917.

It must be added that although the Berlin Cabinet had consented to a joint elaboration of the project, it not only took no steps to recommend it to the Porte, but even endeavoured to prevent its acceptance. The signature of the German representative is absent from the agreement of February 8, 1914, which transformed the Russo-German project into a Russo-Turkish convention.

In reviewing the incidents that preceded the signature of the Armenian convention of 1914, I am reminded of a conversation I had with the Imperial Chancellor during one of my short visits to Berlin on my way to France. I mentioned to Herr von Bethmann-Hollweg the advantages of closer and more confidential relations between the Russian and the German representatives in Constantinople. His reply was quite unexpected: 'Yes,' he said, 'this is certainly very much to be desired, especially as we have until now always been neglected by you (*wir sind immer vernachlässit worden*).' Anyone who is even superficially acquainted with diplomatic life in the Turkish capital, during the decade that preceded the war, will understand the inappropriateness of this remark. The German Ambassadors in Constantinople, and especially the famous Baron Marschall von Bieberstein, did not play the rôle of ordinary representatives of a Great European Power – in itself a very high position in the East; they insisted that they were personal representatives of the Emperor Wilhelm II, who had proclaimed himself protector of Islam. In conformity with the new historical rôle assumed by their Sovereign, the German Ambassadors tried to create for themselves a special position among their colleagues, and to stand apart from them as much as possible; they endeavoured to surround themselves with special prestige in the eyes of the Turkish Government, and confined their relations with the rest of the Diplomatic Corps to a strict minimum. I reminded Herr von Bethmann-Hollweg of this, and left him to judge whether it was easy, under such conditions, for a Russian Ambassador to establish those close relations with the German representatives which were sometimes necessary to our interests and those of the whole of Europe. In speaking of the insufficient intercourse between the German representatives and their colleagues of the Triple Entente, the Imperial Chancellor was perhaps

sincere, but Baron von Bieberstein and Baron von Wangenheim had their own views on the subject, and did not always take into consideration the opinion of their chief. During the period when the foreign policy of the German Empire was controlled by Bethmann-Hollweg, the actions of its diplomatic representatives were not always in accordance with his instructions. The famous German discipline – an object of admiration and sometimes of envy to other Governments – did not extend to the Foreign Office.

In the early days of June, 1914, King Frederick-Augustus of Saxony arrived in Russia. His visit was prompted by a desire to thank the Emperor for sending a Russian military deputation to the ceremonies that took place in Germany, in 1913, on the occasion of the centenary of the battle of Leipzig, where the Allied Powers had obtained a brilliant victory over Napoleon. Having driven the French out of the limits of her Empire, Russia had continued the struggle against 'the foe of the human race' from no considerations of personal safety, but solely in order to deliver Germany from his yoke.

The King remained two days in Russia and stayed at the Great Palace of Tsarskoié-Sélo. He was received with all the honours due to the head of an ancient dynasty, which had played an important part in the history of Europe; although after the unification of Germany under the supremacy of Prussia it had sunk to the level of a secondary reigning house.

Besides the usual Court festivities, a review of the Guards Regiments stationed at Tsarskoié-Sélo was held in honour of the King. From the windows of my summer residence in the Palace, I watched this magnificent display. I admired the beauty of our gallant troops, without dreaming that in a few weeks the flower of our Army would be marching to defend Russia against the advancing armies of that very country to which the Royal visitor belonged. What has become of these splendid young men? More than half were killed in battle with the German foe, while the rest have perished, fighting for the honour and freedom of their country in a still more terrible struggle against treason at home.

The kindly and simple-minded King evidently enjoyed the review. I heard later on that, when he returned to Saxony, still under the influence of his cordial reception in Russia, he opposed the policy of the Berlin Cabinet, which could only result in a universal catastrophe. It is only just to record this fact to his credit.

CHAPTER VIII

'This war is the greatest crime ever perpetrated against mankind. Those who originated it have a terrible responsibility on their conscience and stand now unmasked.' – *My speech in the Duma on February* 22, 1916.

At the beginning of January, 1913, the French Prime Minister and Minister for Foreign Affairs, M. Poincaré, was elected President of the French Republic in succession to M. Fallières – a choice which was hailed with satisfaction in Russia. At the suggestion of our Ambassador in Paris, M. Isvolsky, which received my support, the Emperor conferred the Order of St. Andrew upon the new President as soon as he had taken up his duties. This was a departure from the usual custom of granting the highest decoration of the Empire to the head of a State only after he had occupied the position for some time; exceptions were made only on some special occasion, such as a personal meeting.

M. Poincaré's visit to St. Petersburg in 1912 had left a good impression. We appreciated his peaceful disposition and his loyalty to the alliance, no less than his firmness and tenacity of purpose; this last is a quality most valuable in a statesman, even when it verges on the corresponding defect – obstinacy.

Since the beginning of the twentieth century, a strained and troubled political atmosphere had prevailed in Europe, due to the lasting bitterness between Germany and France – despite temporary agreements – and to the naval rivalry which had lately developed between Great Britain and Germany. To these two unfavourable influences was added a third: it became clear, when Prince Bülow had embarked upon his *Welt-Politik*, that the Central Powers were bent on dominating the Balkan States both politically and economically, without regard to the rights of those States, or the vital interests of Russia. This menace, which closely concerned us, caused the Russian Government sincerely to welcome the appearance at the head of the French State of a man on whose loyalty to our common political principles we could entirely rely. It was undoubtedly reassuring to see Poincaré President of the French Republic in 1913. All his previous activities, and still more, my acquaintance with his dominating character, led me to

hope that he would be able, at any moment of danger to the State, to transform the purely nominal functions which the democratic suspiciousness of the French Constitution had assigned to the President into a political authority whose real significance would be felt both in France and abroad.

Our Ambassador in Paris had informed me that the new President intended to pay an official visit to Russia at the first opportunity; and on July 7 (old style), 1914, M. Poincaré arrived at Kronstadt on board the battleship *La France*, accompanied by M. Viviani, his President of the Council and Minister for Foreign Affairs.

The meeting between the Emperor and the French President took place in the roadstead of Kronstadt and was of a very ceremonious and friendly character. The Emperor invited the French Ambassador in St. Petersburg, M. Paléologue (who had recently arrived), M. Isvolsky and myself to the Imperial Yacht *Alexandria*, to meet M. Poincaré. The *Alexandria* then left, with all of us on board, for Peterhof, where an apartment in the Great Palace had been prepared for the President.

It was a bright and sunny day, and Peterhof had never seemed more beautiful than when, in all its regal splendour, it welcomed the French President, whose modest figure showed in strange contrast against that brilliant background.

The President's visit to Russia lasted three days – fateful days in the history of humanity; for during those three days were taken, in Vienna and Berlin, the mad and criminal decisions which plunged Europe into incredible calamities, covered it with ruins, and arrested for so long the course of its natural development.

In the middle of the summer of 1914, a new cause of international unrest was added to all those I have mentioned. Its true significance was not, however, at once revealed. On June 28, the Archduke Francis Ferdinand, Heir Apparent to the throne of Austria-Hungary, and his morganatic wife, the Duchess of Hohenburg, were murdered in Sarajevo. The assassin, a young Serb – a Bosnian by birth, and consequently an Austrian subject – was arrested on the spot. When the first impression of horror had worn off, the agitation caused in Austria-Hungary, and indeed throughout the world, by this crime seemed to be subsiding; but news then reached us from

Vienna that the Austrian Government was inclined to regard the Sarajevo murders as the outcome of a political plot whose roots could be traced to Belgrade. Austrian public opinion, prejudiced by the long-continued and incessant campaign of persecution of Serbia in the official and unofficial press, caught at this rumour; and in a few days a dangerous wave of feeling caused by the conviction that the Serbian Government had been concerned in the assassination of the Archduke, swept over Austria-Hungary, and even spread to Germany. The inquiry held at Sarajevo, immediately after the assassination, afforded no grounds whatever for this supposition, and the investigations of the agent sent by the Viennese Ministry of Foreign Affairs fully established the fact that such complicity was out of the question. Nevertheless, the Austro-Hungarian Government, backed by the whole of the Viennese and Buda-Pesth press, continued to denounce Serbia; and the popular clamour soon culminated in murders and destruction of property in different towns of the Dual Monarchy, where the inhabitants were Serbs. A shameless political agitation, disguised as patriotic indignation, was carried on, evidently with a view to finding the desired pretext for bringing Serbia to account. The Russian Government, warned by the experience of the last five years, heard with anxiety the bad news from Vienna; we daily expected the Viennese Cabinet to make some openly hostile move against Serbia.

The three days that the President of the French Republic spent in Peterhof were therefore passed under the shadow of impending calamity. The premature return to St. Petersburg of the Austro-Hungarian Ambassador, Count Szapary, whose leave had not yet expired, did not tend to reassure me. Yet I hoped that the Emperor Francis Joseph, an old man of eighty-four, would hesitate to darken the last years of his life by bloodshed. The innocence of the Serbian Government of any complicity in the Sarajevo murders was so clear that we still believed that the Austro-Hungarian Government would be obliged to withdraw its accusation against the Serbian authorities of participating in the crime of a fanatical youth – a crime, moreover, which could be of no benefit whatever to Serbia. I myself considered the attempt of the Viennese Government to associate the murder of the Archduke with a foreign plot

particularly senseless, because Aehrenthal's policy, blindly followed by Berchtold, had for many years past caused an accumulation of combustible material within the boundaries of the Dual Monarchy itself.

Soon our alternate hopes and fears had to give way to the stern reality, which proved to be worse than the most pessimistic could have imagined.

On the evening of July 10 (old style), the battleship *La France* left Kronstadt, sailing for Stockholm. Almost at the same moment, the Austro-Hungarian Minister in Belgrade delivered an ultimatum to the Serbian Minister for Foreign Affairs, couched in terms which aroused the astonishment and indignation of all Europe. Its appearance marked the advent of a new era in the history, not only of Europe, but of the whole world. The Austrian ultimatum is still so fresh in our memories that there is no need to speak of it in detail. It is sufficient to remark here, that claims and demands such as it contained had never been made on any European Power, and that their acceptance in full by Serbia would have been equivalent to a voluntary abdication of her national independence.

The moment of its delivery had been arranged by the Viennese Government to coincide with the departure of the French President from Russia. The day and hour of his departure had been ascertained beforehand by Vienna, through the medium of the German Embassy in St. Petersburg, which had made inquiries at the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The Viennese Government had been afraid to entrust these inquiries to its own representative, lest suspicion should be aroused. By this manœuvre, Count Berchtold sought to prevent the Russian and French Governments from seizing the opportunity afforded by the presence of President Poincaré in Russia, to concert a common plan of action with regard to the new situation created by the Austrian ultimatum. He therefore waited to throw his bomb until the President and M. Viviani had left Russia. It would take them four days to reach France, even if they did not stop anywhere on the way.

Having learned of the delivery of the ultimatum on the night of July 23–24, I left Tsarskoié-Sélo for St. Petersburg next morning, for I saw that we were on the eve of important events. A time-limit of only forty-eight hours had been im-

posed for the acceptance of the Austrian demands. The shortness of this period made it impossible for the Powers of the Triple Entente to come to any agreement as to the common measures that should be taken to exercise a restraining influence on the Viennese Government. My first effort, therefore, was to obtain a delay for the Serbians. My request for an extension of the time-limit of the ultimatum was definitely refused by Count Berchtold. I then turned to Germany, seeking her co-operation both through the medium of our Embassy in Berlin and in personal conversations with the German Ambassador in St. Petersburg; but my efforts proved fruitless. This confirmed my impression that the German Government intended to act once more, as it did in 1909, in full solidarity with Austria-Hungary, but with even greater decision, as befitted the greater importance of the occasion. Count Berchtold gave no reason for his refusal to allow Serbia's reply to the Viennese demands to be postponed. The reluctance of Germany to restrain Austria-Hungary from the dangerous path she had chosen, was attributed, in Berlin, to the fact that the Berlin Cabinet did not consider itself justified in interfering in a quarrel between its ally and Serbia, which concerned those countries alone and would have to be localized if a struggle arose between them. The absurdity of this assertion was obvious; it was evident that Germany intended to ignore, in favour of Austria-Hungary, the well-known facts of the last century of Balkan history. It was clear that we had to do, not with the rash decision of a short-sighted Minister, undertaken at his own risk and on his own responsibility, but with a carefully prepared plan, elaborated with the aid of the German Government, without whose consent and promise of support Austria-Hungary would never have ventured upon its execution.

This conclusion was dictated by common sense; but the publication, in 1919, of the secret diplomatic documents of the Austro-Hungarian Government, as well as those of the German Government, published by Kautsky in his *Diplomatic Documents*, amply confirmed it. These documents reveal, in minute detail, the threads of the Viennese plot, and the support which it received from the German Emperor and his Government.

The Austrian ultimatum brought Europe to the edge of an

abyss, creating a situation which could have no issue but a European war. There is no other example in history of a voluntary action undertaken with such thoughtless levity and producing such appalling consequences. Relying on the support of a powerful ally, the Austrian Government plunged into this attempt to improve its precarious internal situation and restore its prestige abroad – lost through the incompetence of its diplomats – without weighing the consequences or even knowing the number of its adversaries. This ally, Germany, might have arrested the insane decision with a single word, as she had done once before, no further back than the second Balkan War.[1] But this time, to Austria's perdition, to her own misfortune and that of humanity, she refused to pronounce that word: instead, she openly encouraged Austria's policy. This was more than enough to frustrate all the efforts of Russia and the other Powers of the Triple Entente to avert a war from which no statesman in his senses could expect anything but the most terrible calamities for his country.

After the defeat of Germany and the destruction of Austria-Hungary, those whom public opinion in Europe held responsible for the war – including even the Kaiser – felt the need of exonerating themselves, if not in the eyes of the whole world, at least in those of their own countrymen, from the accusations of malice or incompetence heaped upon them, not only by their opponents but also by their own people, who were disappointed and indignant at the disastrous outcome of a war in which they had been promised certain victory. The accused, in innumerable exculpatory books and pamphlets, have endeavoured to prove that they did not desire the war, that it was forced upon them by crafty antagonists, that they entered it in self-defence, and so forth.

I do not feel justified in attributing falsehood and bad faith to all these persons without exception. The experience of a lifetime has taught me that people may easily lose the power of distinguishing between their desires and intentions and their actual conduct. There can be no doubt that among those whom I am inclined to hold responsible for the world war and its far-reaching consequences, there were and are men who did

[1] In 1913, Italy, and after her, Germany, declined to take any part in the war with Serbia meditated by Austria-Hungary.

not desire it. At the same time, they did nothing to prevent it; they folded their arms and waited passively for its advent, feeling, no doubt, that since war was inevitable sooner or later,[1] it was perhaps as well to let it break out at once.[2] True, they had not reckoned with the possibility of an unfavourable issue for their own country. Had they possessed foresight in however slight a degree, their philosophic indifference to such an essentially terrible event as war, with its endless complications and contingencies, would have been considerably modified. Their indifference would have given way to the realization that it was their duty to put a stop to that playing with fire, which had been going on in Vienna since the time of Aehrenthal and during the whole tenure of office of his successor, Count Berchtold, whose fear and hatred of Serbia had become almost a monomania.

In estimating the responsibility of German statesmen for the catastrophe of 1914, one is inclined to ask oneself what considerations guided them when, on July 6 of that year – just a fortnight before the delivery of the ultimatum – they gave their consent and promised their support to the political programme, aiming at the destruction of Serbia, submitted for the Kaiser's approval by the Austrian Government, and accompanied by a personal letter from the Emperor Francis Joseph.

This letter, which assigned an important rôle to Bulgaria, as a thoroughly reliable element, from the Austrian point of view, in the future struggle with Serbia, contained passages too clear and unambiguous to leave room for doubt as to the real intentions of the Viennese Cabinet: 'The efforts of my Government,' wrote the Emperor Francis Joseph, 'must henceforth be directed to the isolation and diminution (*Verkleinerung*) of

[1] On April 7, 1913, the German Imperial Chancellor, Bethmann-Hollweg, delivered a speech which contained the following words: 'If it came to a European conflagration, which would set Slavs and Germans face to face.' Such words, from the lips of the Chancellor, constituted a most serious indiscretion, and considerably alarmed the German Ambassador in St. Petersburg, who visited me specially in order to efface the disagreeable impression they had produced on the Russian Government, and on Russian public opinion.

[2] This attitude to the war was characteristic of the Imperial Chancellor and the higher officials of the German Foreign Office.

Serbia.' What relation is there between this and the formal promise received by us from Vienna that no attempts would be made on Serbian territory? On the same page of the Imperial letter we read, with reference to the proposed creation of a new Balkan alliance under the protection of the Triple Alliance – in other words, the full subjugation of the Balkans to Austro-German policy – 'This will only be possible when Serbia, the centre of the Pan-Slavist policy, has ceased to exist as a political factor in the Balkans.' [1] These avowals in the Emperor of Austria's letter, written *before* the murder of the Heir to the Throne, were but an expression of the constant underlying *motif* of a merciless struggle with Serbia and of her complete destruction.

What was the answer of the German Emperor and of his Chancellor, Bethmann-Hollweg, to Francis Joseph's letter and Count Berchtold's note? After studying the contents of both these communications and thoroughly approving the intentions of the Viennese Cabinet with regard to Serbia, the German Emperor declared to the Austro-Hungarian Ambassador Szoeguiény, who had delivered them, that 'if it even came to war between Austria-Hungary and Russia, Austria could rest assured of Germany's habitual loyalty and her support.' 'Russia, moreover,' he added, 'is far from being prepared for war at present, and will think twice before taking up arms.' The Emperor further added that 'if the Austrians were really convinced of the necessity of military action against Serbia, he would regret their letting the present favourable moment pass without anything being undertaken. As to Rumania, of whose attitude grave doubts were entertained in Vienna, he would see to it that King Charles and his counsellors behaved properly.' [2]

Such was the Kaiser's answer. As to the Chancellor, M. Bethmann-Hollweg declared to the Austrian Ambassador, in the presence of M. Zimmermann, Assistant Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, that, with regard to Austrian relations with Serbia, the German Government considered that Austria must judge for herself what action was necessary. Whatever her decision, she could count on Germany's support, as a

[1] *Austro-Hungarian Diplomatic Documents.* 1919. No. 1, page 3.
[2] *Austro-Hungarian Diplomatic Documents.* 1919. No. 6, page 22.

friend and ally. The Ambassador adds that ' both the Chancellor and the Emperor consider immediate action (*sofortiges Einschreiten*) to be the best and most radical way of solving our difficulties in the Balkans. From an international point of view, the Chancellor considers the present moment more favourable than a later one.'

The following short extract from Count Berchtold's letter to Count Tisza,[1] the Hungarian Prime Minister, is equally interesting as an illustration of the sentiments prevailing in Berlin: 'Tchirshky, the German Ambassador in Vienna, has just left me. He informed me that he had received a telegram, in which the Emperor charges him to "emphasize strongly" (*mit allem Nachdruck zu erklären*) that some action by the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy against Serbia is expected in Berlin; it would be thought incomprehensible that the Austrians should fail to take advantage of this opportunity of dealing her a blow.'

The Austrian Ambassador in Berlin completes his summary of the attitude of various highly placed Germans towards the Viennese Cabinet's plan for an attack on Serbia, in a secret telegram dated July 9, giving Count Berchtold an account of his interview with the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, Herr von Jagow, who had just returned from leave:[2] 'I could see that the Secretary of State entirely approves of the attitude of the German Government; he is also of the opinion that an offensive must immediately (*ohne Verzug*) be undertaken against Serbia.' A passage from another secret telegram from Count Szoeguiény to Count Berchtold, in which he repeats von Jagow's words with regard to the postponement of the ultimatum to Serbia until after the departure of M. Poincaré from St. Petersburg, further illustrates von Jagow's attitude towards the Austrian plans: 'The Secretary of State intensely (*ganz ausserordentlich*) regrets this postponement. He fears that German sympathy and interest may diminish in consequence of this delay.'[3]

Summing up his telegraphic communications in a detailed

[1] *Austro-Hungarian Diplomatic Documents.* 1919. No. 10, page 39.
[2] *Austro-Hungarian Diplomatic Documents.* 1919. No. 13, page 46.
[3] *Austro-Hungarian Diplomatic Documents.* 1919. No. 23, page 59.

report to his chief, the Ambassador writes: 'As Your Excellency already knows from my telegraphic dispatches, and from the personal impressions of Count Hoyos,[1] the Emperor Wilhelm, and all the German political leaders, are not only determined to stand by us as loyal allies, but encourage (*ermunteren*) us in the most definite manner not to let the present opportunity escape us. They urge us to take energetic action against Serbia, and have done, once for all, with this nest of conspirators and revolutionaries. They leave us entirely free to choose our own method of accomplishing this.'[2] The same report contains the following characteristic passage: '. . . leading circles in Germany and the Emperor himself frankly urge (*drängen*) us to undertake military action against Serbia.'

Szoeguiény considers it necessary to explain to his Government why Germany regards this moment as particularly favourable for taking energetic measures against Serbia. In his opinion, the authorities in Berlin have come to the conclusion that 'Russia is arming herself for a war with her Western neighbour, but no longer considers it imminent. It has a place, but a fairly remote one, in her political calculations for the future. She bears the possibility of such a war in mind, and is energetically preparing for it; but she does not think of undertaking it as yet, or rather, she is not yet sufficiently prepared for it.' A further consideration, according to Szoeguiény, is the fact that 'Germany has sufficient reason to believe that if a war were to break out on the grounds of the Balkan question, England would not at present take part in it, even should it lead to an armed conflict with Russia, or even with France.' 'And this,' adds the Ambassador, 'is not because England's relations with Germany have so greatly improved that Germany need no longer fear her enmity, but because England does not at present desire war, and is not in the least inclined to pull chestnuts out of the fire for Serbia or, in the final issue, for Russia. Thus,' he concludes, 'the moral to be drawn from all

[1] An official of the Austro-Hungarian Foreign Office, who brought the Emperor Franz Joseph's letter to Berlin, and who, with Count Forgach, was Count Berchtold's most intimate collaborator.

[2] *Austro-Hungarian Diplomatic Documents.* 1919. No. 15, pages 48, 49 and 50.

these considerations is that the general political situation (*Konstellation*) is extremely favourable to us just now.'

Looking impartially at this information, given by an old diplomat, who had represented Austria-Hungary for many years in Berlin, and who enjoyed the perfect confidence and esteem, not only of German administrative circles, but of the Kaiser himself, one can believe that he expressed very exactly the mind of Wilhelm and his Government.

When the game was lost and the German revolutionary authorities published the secret diplomatic correspondence of the former Government, many persons who had protested their innocence in the matter of the origin of the war, felt themselves to be implicated by these revelations; they sought to explain away the information contained in Count Szoeguiény's dispatches by attributing to him a senile weakening of the intellect.[1] I do not know Szoeguiény personally and cannot therefore judge of the state of his mental capacities, except from such of his dispatches as have appeared in print; but people who knew him at the very time when these dispatches were written tell me that his intellect was clear and his memory unimpaired, and that he showed no signs of mental decay. I consider it my duty to add, that I have always heard Szoeguiény and his colleague in Constantinople, Marquis Pallavicini, described as the two most talented representatives of Austro-Hungarian diplomacy.

But this is neither here nor there. Whatever may have been the state of Count Szoeguiény's health, the information which he communicated to Vienna finds complete corroboration in the German *Diplomatic Documents* mentioned above, published by Kautsky simultaneously with the Austrian 'Red Book,' from which I have taken my references.

The Emperor Wilhelm had a habit of scribbling on the margins of dispatches presented to him for perusal a great number of characteristic notes and remarks, often peculiar, both in expression and content; many of these are reproduced verbatim by Kautsky. One, which leaves nothing to

[1] Such an interpretation of unwelcome revelations was put forward in Germany in other cases. Thus, Vice-Chancellor Payer explained the revelations of the well-known Dr. Mühlon as due to his pathological state.

be desired in brevity and force of expression, may be quoted here: 'Now or never.'[1] This remark appears in the Emperor's handwriting on a dispatch from the German Ambassador in Vienna, Count Tchirshky, beside the passage in which the Ambassador refers to the general desire of the Austrians 'definitely to settle accounts with the Serbians some day.' A few lines further on in the same dispatch, the Emperor notes, with regard to the thoroughly sound opinion expressed by his Ambassador as to the necessity of warning the Austrians against too hasty decisions: 'Who gave him power to do so? This is very silly. It is not his business at all,' etc., ending with the following remark: 'Tchirshky ought to forget all about this nonsense. It is time to settle accounts with the Serbs, and the sooner the better.' Such was the Throne's opinion of the first reasonable advice given by a German diplomat to the Viennese Cabinet; it is not surprising that it was not repeated. As to Tchirshky himself, he did not forget the lesson, and straightway abandoning the ungrateful rôle of prudent counsellor, he became one of the most open fomenters of the war.

Before passing to other subjects, I will quote two more of the Emperor's remarks – one on a dispatch from this same Tchirshky, in which he had written that the delivery of the ultimatum to Serbia was put off until the departure of President Poincaré from Russia. The Emperor notes, opposite this passage: 'It is a pity.'[2] Another and still more characteristic remark adorns the margin of the report of the German Ambassador in London, Prince Lichnowsky, in which that calm and sensible diplomat, who viewed with anxiety the feverish mood which had taken hold of his Government, informs his Government of Sir Edward Grey's apprehensions concerning the shortness of the time-limit in the Austrian ultimatum, which threatened to make war almost inevitable. Lichnowsky reports that the English Minister had declared to him his willingness to make representations, in concert with Germany, in order to obtain a prolongation of this term, hoping in this way to find the desired issue out of this difficult situation. The Emperor's note opposite this passage is: 'It is useless.'[3]

These extracts will suffice to indicate the Kaiser's state of

[1] Kautsky's *Diplomatic Documents*. I, No. 7, page 11.
[2] *Ibid.*, No. 49, page 74. [3] *Ibid.*, No. 157, page 171.

mind, which sometimes verged on a complete loss of self-control and mental equilibrium. They could be multiplied indefinitely by quoting other remarks, of an openly insulting character, with reference to those who did not gratify his humour. But the examples given are amply sufficient to reveal his attitude.

I will here quote a very short but characteristic document – the telegram sent by von Jagow, the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, to the German Ambassador in Vienna: 'A note, intentionally softened for the benefit of European diplomacy, will appear in the *Nord-Deutsche Allgemeine Zeitung* concerning the Austro-Serbian quarrel. An important semi-official paper must not prematurely sound the trumpet of alarm. I beg you to see that this caution is not interpreted as a desire on our part to evade the decisive policy of Vienna.'

In addition to the efforts of the Emperor Nicholas and of the Russian Government to obtain the peaceful intervention of the Berlin Cabinet in Vienna, similar attempts were made by King Charles of Rumania, whose opinion had always had great weight with the Kaiser and the German Government. This wisest of the Hohenzollerns expressed, in conversation with the representative of his German cousin, certain reflections which should have given food for thought to the Emperor and his diplomats; but apparently they produced no impression. The Austrians had succeeded in persuading the German Government that Russia contemplated the creation of a new Balkan alliance, directed against Austria-Hungary, and this may explain, to a certain extent, the strong support accorded in Berlin to their insane plan for the destruction of Serbia. When the German representative pictured to King Charles the dangers that might result for Austria-Hungary and even for Germany, from the Russian designs, the King interrupted him by remarking that he knew nothing of such plans. The King's observation deserved considerable attention, for this conversation took place about two months after the interview at Constanza, where the Emperor and myself had expressed our views frankly to King Charles and his Ministers on the situation as it stood after the two Balkan Wars and the Peace Treaty of Bucharest. The Balkan Alliance of 1912 had by then done its work; and after the treachery

of Ferdinand of Coburg and Radoslavov, there were no elements at hand for a new alliance. As to the question of Serbia's alleged complicity in the assassination of the Archduke Francis Ferdinand, which according to Count Berchtold was credited without hesitation in Berlin, King Charles declared that he did not believe that the Serbian Government had any part in it; he had already discussed the subject with the Austro-Hungarian Minister, Count Czernin, and had asked him whether any serious proofs had been discovered in Vienna. The King added, that although the political situation was grave, he did not consider it hopeless. He thought that the Viennese authorities had lost their heads, and Berlin would do well to try and calm the bellicose spirit of the Austro-Hungarian Government. The King expressed his disapproval of the Austrian administration in Bosnia, and spoke disparagingly of Count Berchtold's diplomatic abilities. He referred to the dangerous agitation carried on by the Serbian press, and said that it ought to be stopped, as the indiscriminate attacks in the daily papers were chiefly to blame for the constant excitement of public opinion. In Vienna, too, the authorities should use their influence to induce the press to cease its attacks on Serbia. He added that I had told him at Constanza that Russia had, for reasons of internal policy, no intention of beginning a war; but that she would not permit Austria-Hungary to make an assault on Serbia.[1] 'In that case,' added the King, 'Rumania would not consider herself under any obligations.'[2]

These arguments, which I have briefly summarized, might have been pondered with advantage in Berlin. The opinion of Charles of Hohenzollern, whose warm German patriotism no one could doubt, should have had a sobering effect on the Kaiser and his Government. But unfortunately the accusation of Serbian complicity in the murder of the Archduke, launched by Berchtold and maintained, in spite of Serbian official contradictions, from motives which even then were sufficiently obvious, and which the publication of all the

[1] The King's memory was here at fault. Russia had no grounds for war, and no intention of going to war with anyone as long as her vital interests were not concerned. I had spoken in that sense to the King.

[2] Kautsky's *Diplomatic Documents*. No. 41, page 61

official secret documents has now made abundantly clear, had taken such firm root in German public opinion that it was impossible to talk to any German of its falseness and complete lack of foundation. The guilt of Serbia, which the inquiry conducted by an Austro-Hungarian official had not only failed to establish, but had actually refuted, had now become, in Germany, an undeniable fact, and was consequently the basis of all discussions of the Austro-Serbian quarrel. I remember how deeply indignant I felt, whenever I came up against it in my wearisome conversations on the subject with Count Pourtalès. In this, as in other respects, he was a typical example of that class of German who defends the justice of the German point of view, even when it is difficult to reconcile it with the evidence. I was, willy-nilly, obliged to recognize the truth of a remark I once heard, many years ago, from the late M. Milovanovich – one of the most prominent Serbian politicians – who asserted that the majority of Germans were constitutionally incapable of being impartial to a Frenchman, and above all to a Slav. Such men were numerous in Berlin in 1914, and the Emperor himself unfortunately was one of them. I afterwards learned that he had an inborn hatred of the Slavs. In the Memoirs of the Austrian General, Count Stürgkh, who was attached to the Kaiser's General Headquarters during the war, I chanced upon the following typical remark, which the author heard from the Kaiser himself: 'I hate the Slavs. I know it is a sin to do so. We ought not to hate anyone. But I cannot help hating them.'[1] It is very probable that the Emperor's idiosyncrasy was shared by many of his entourage, who undoubtedly had a decisive influence on the course of events at the time of the World War.

In reviewing the events that preceded the war, I see more clearly the psychology of those Germans who were interested, politically and otherwise, in bringing the whole of Eastern Europe within the orbit of German influence. They held, quite rightly from their point of view, that it would not be advantageous to their aims to wait until Russia, whose serious military preparations had only begun five or six years after the end of the Japanese War, should have attained a state of

[1] *Politische und militärische Erinnerungen aus meinem Leben.* Graf Joseph Stürgkh. Page 232.

technical development which would render the realization of the German plan impossible, or at least, very difficult. Nevertheless, I must admit that the initiative in the European War undoubtedly belongs, not to Germany, but to Austria-Hungary. Although quite unprepared, she decided to undertake it at any cost, for the reasons I have given; she had complete faith in Germany's invincibility, if not in her own. Germany, who had assumed a heavy responsibility in encouraging the criminal levity of her ally, rushed blindfold into the war, with the same belief in her invincible strength; she felt fully prepared, from a military point of view, for a war on two fronts, although politically she was quite unprepared for it. The authorities in Berlin did not foresee the dimensions it would inevitably assume, nor the problems – far beyond Germany's power to solve – which it would raise. The Kaiser was accordingly able to declare quite sincerely to his troops that he had not desired the war, and German statesmen could proclaim to the ends of the earth that they had not wished to go to war with the whole world. As I have said, Germany did not, in fact, seek an excuse for declaring war in 1914. The excuse had already been found by Austria-Hungary, and Germany decided to seize the opportunity thus offered of settling accounts with her Eastern and Western neighbours, and of crushing their power once for all. She could then proceed quietly to execute her plan of recasting Central Europe on a new basis, transforming it, for her own purposes, into a corridor to the Near East.

In order to realize this plan, it was necessary first to destroy Serbia, and then to drive Russia out of the Balkan Peninsula, replacing her influence by that of Austria-Hungary. The Kaiser very frankly confessed this, writing a note, as his custom was, on the margin of Tchirshky's dispatch of July 24: 'Austria-Hungary must have a preponderating influence, to the exclusion of Russia, in the small Balkan States; otherwise we shall never have peace.'[1] It was evident that, so long as Serbia was capable of maintaining an independent existence, Austria-Hungary would be unable to rule quietly over the five million Serbs in Bosnia and Herzegovina, annexed by Aehrenthal; still less could she hope to fulfil her old dream of taking

[1] Kautsky's *Diplomatic Documents*. No. 155, page 168.

possession of Salonika: Germany, moreover, could not be master in Constantinople,[1] nor derive from the great railway scheme which was to link Hamburg with Bagdad the full benefits envisaged by its promoters.

Russia was an obstacle to the realization of all these dreams and plans. She was unwilling to renounce without a struggle her influence in the Balkan States which she had liberated for their own welfare and independence and for her own safety. Neither would she consent to recognize the Kaiser, in place of the Sultan, as keeper of the keys of the Turkish Straits. Germany, therefore, pursuing the ambitious designs of her new *Welt-Politik*, felt she need no longer adhere to the opinion expressed by Bismarck in 1890: 'the furtherance of Austria-Hungary's Balkan ambitions is less the affair of Germany than of any other State.'[2]

The present moment, although not chosen by Germany, seemed opportune. The authorities in Berlin were not convinced that Russia would care to risk a war in order to preserve her position in the Balkans, which had been considerably consolidated by the two Balkan Wars. In any case, they scarcely believed her capable of carrying on a war. Nor did they entertain a very high opinion of France as a military power. As for the possibility of England siding with their enemies, no one in Germany ever thought of it; the warnings of the German Ambassador in London, Prince Lichnowsky, were derided, and he was indulgently referred to as 'good old Lichnowsky' at the Berlin Foreign Office.

Basing themselves upon this view of the general political situation, the authorities in Berlin decided not only to support Austria-Hungary with energy, but even to encourage her crusade against the 'Belgrade regicides.' If Russia should resolve to take the part of the Serbs and protect them from Austrian aggression, it would be easier for Germany to undertake a war against her now than later; although, without the Austrian provocation, she would probably have been left in peace for some time at least.

While urging Austria-Hungary into a war with Serbia, the

[1] The military mission of General Liman von Sanders was the first step towards the realization of this plan.

[2] C. Hamman, *Der neue Kurs.*

Berlin Cabinet at the same time demanded its 'localization,' without realizing that this was impossible; under the existing political grouping of the Powers, a war between two of them was bound to involve the whole of Europe.

The diplomatic information of the Berlin Cabinet was strikingly deficient. When there was no danger of international complications, German diplomats often created them, turning insignificant incidents into political events. On the other hand, when such of their representatives as were endowed with the gift of foresight uttered a warning, having sufficient ground for their apprehensions, no one listened; their pessimism was attributed to excessive impressionability or *naïveté*, as was the case with Prince Lichnowsky. Consequently, few of them had the courage to continue to inform their Governments of what they saw and heard, when they felt the information would not coincide with the prevailing mood in Berlin. The majority of the German representatives abroad – Count Pourtalès, for instance – were quite sincerely convinced of the infallibility of their chiefs; and the margins of their dispatches were accordingly adorned with most amiable remarks in the Imperial handwriting. Others, like Tchirshky, seeing that they had struck a false note, rapidly changed their tone to accord with the diapason of Berlin.

One must, however, do this justice to Austro-Hungarian diplomacy: it acted on doubtful information, and argued from erroneous premises; but it conducted its policy with greater logic than its powerful ally. Count Berchtold knew what he wanted, and pursued his own aims, even though he had to count upon foreign forces for their fulfilment; while the Kaiser and his counsellors allowed themselves to be harnessed to the clumsy Austrian coach, long since embedded in a quagmire from which even Germany's strength would have difficulty in dragging it. German help was Austria-Hungary's last hope; she must obtain it by any means, fair or foul; and she was past fearing to take risks. For Germany, on the other hand, however similar in the long run her political programme might be to that of her ally, the abandonment of her freedom of initiative and the obligations with which she had fettered herself with such extraordinary levity, involved the greatest risks, owing to the uncertainty of the general political situation.

July 5 proved a fatal day for the German Empire and the German nation.[1] On that day, Germany renounced her position as leader of the Triple Alliance, and bound herself, hand and foot, to her helpless ally in a hopeless enterprise.

The admirers of Bismarck, explaining the origin of the Austro-German Alliance in 1879, say that he did not intend to link the fate of Germany with that of Austria-Hungary for an indefinite period. The agreement was only designed to meet a temporary need, and once this need was past, he would undoubtedly have found another political combination, equally advantageous to Germany, but without the risks and inconveniences inseparable from an alliance with a State that was rapidly and irresistibly falling into decay. Still less was it his intention to drop the reins and allow himself to be led, blindfold, wherever Austria-Hungary's petty interests and improvident calculations called her, where Germany had little to gain and much to lose. Bismarck's admirers were probably correct in their estimate of his policy. It is difficult, even now when the prestige of Bismarck's name, which was extraordinary during his lifetime and in the first years after his death, has begun to decline, to think of Germany as being led by the nose by Austria-Hungary. From Bismarck's point of view, an alliance with her, while offering the necessary guarantees for her existence, would assign her a secondary rôle. She was not only useful, but even indispensable to Germany, in defending the latter's southern frontier, thus enabling her to carry on a war on two fronts. The alliance of the Central Powers was no doubt created with this object, while the drawing of Italy into their alliance was intended to prevent her from coming to a closer understanding with France, by artificially maintaining a rivalry between them. A further part was assigned to Italy: Bismarck hoped to paralyse Italian Irredentism, which was dangerous to Austria, by harnessing both these countries to the same yoke. This policy may have seemed very wise at the time, but, soon after the death of its author, its futility became clear, and Germany had to admit that the Triple Alliance had not fulfilled the hopes placed upon it. The alliance with Rumania, which was supplementary to the Triple Alli-

[1] On July 5, a Council was held in Potsdam, where it was decided to support Austria-Hungary to the end.

ance, likewise proved disappointing, and King Charles himself was obliged to confess, even before the war, that he was an unreliable ally. There only remained Austria-Hungary, upon whom, old and debilitated though she was, Germany now built all her hopes. Berlin also counted, to a certain degree, on Bulgaria and Turkey, but this only in the distant future.

The attempts to come to an agreement with England, which had been the dream of all German statesmen in turn, from Bismarck – who vainly offered Lord Salisbury an alliance against Russia in 1887 – down to Bethmann-Hollweg, were unsuccessful. The English manifested a certain sympathy towards the Central Powers, and did not reject the possibility of a closer understanding with Germany, which would put an end to their competition in naval construction, but Germany proved to be over-exacting. The English were, in their turn, intractable and over-prudent. An agreement was at last attained, but it proved unsatisfactory to both sides.

Relations with France were hopeless. Time had proved powerless to heal the wound caused by the annexation of Alsace and Lorraine. The Germans, having made the fatal mistake of forcibly annexing these two provinces, so closely knit to the French national organism, not only demanded of France an absolute acceptance of the fact – insufferable as it was to her pride – but expected her to forget it. Any reference to it in France was interpreted as a challenge to Germany, or as a manifestation of irreconcilable chauvinism.

I have already referred several times, in the course of these reminiscences, to Germany's relations with Russia. They received but little attention in Berlin, and my conscientious efforts to establish them on a solid and reasonable footing remained fruitless. Our senseless war with Japan, and the first revolutionary outburst which followed it, convinced the Germans that there was no need to stand on ceremony with us, although sometimes, in their lucid moments, they seemed to recognize the presence of great, although hidden, forces in Russia, and to acknowledge her right to future development. But this feeling was transitory, and they were more often inclined to place us on a level with Austria-Hungary as a political force, and to accord the minimum of consideration to our perfectly just claims and demands.

This cursory survey of the events preceding the war leads us to the conclusion that Germany's international position in 1914 was not an enviable one, and bordered on complete isolation. If there was ever a period in the course of her history demanding special prudence and vigilance from her statesmen, it was certainly that which preceded the Great War; while we can with certainty maintain that the level of political talent and creative power in Germany was never lower than at that time.

The majestic edifice of the German Empire, erected by the strong hands of Prince Bismarck, had weathered the storms of forty-four years, while everywhere around it the world was in process of reconstruction, and the very life of Germany was forcing its way, in all directions and with impetuous rapidity, into new channels of economic development. The structure of the German State remained unaffected by the course of historical events, and the rapidly changing conditions of political and economic life in Europe. Outwardly, it seemed as strong and imposing as ever, and the general faith in its firmness and solidity remained unshaken. It had become a kind of dogma, even to German Socialists, whose criticism did not go beyond the limits of professional duty. It was only now and then that a warning voice, generally anonymous, was heard, predicting future calamities for Germany. But these mysterious voices sounded in vain, and soon fell silent. Meanwhile, although outwardly impregnable, Bismarck's stronghold showed, here and there, signs of age and decay, indicating the need for adapting it to modern conditions. The young Emperor, impatient of Bismarck's superior gifts and political experience, banished him to a retirement which he had neither sought nor desired – and which indeed he loathed – and replaced him by a capable and scrupulous military administrator, utterly unprepared for the task of directing Germany's foreign policy. Possessed by the *idée fixe* of an inevitable war between Germany and Russia, the new Chancellor, Count Caprivi, marked his four years' spell at the helm of State by breaking the last remaining bond between the two countries. He was succeeded by Prince Hohenlohe, an intelligent and experienced statesman, whose personal qualities rendered him the most capable of Bismarck's successors in the Chancellorship; unfortunately he was old and infirm. Then came Prince Bülow, a pliant and skilful

diplomat, a talented and witty orator, but lacking any firm principles or ballast – the type of man, in fact, who makes a brilliant career for himself in times of international tranquillity. It was during his administration that Germany's Eastern policy was openly identified, for the first time, with that of Austria-Hungary; she supported the Dual Monarchy with the full weight of her authority, in the most short-sighted and inequitable scheme devised by Vienna in the last twenty-five years. This loyalty to the alliance was not fully appreciated in Austria – it even led to a temporary coolness between Vienna and Berlin. I have already spoken of the impression it produced in Russia. In Germany, however, it was highly commended, as an expression of 'Niebelungen loyalty.'

There is no doubt, however, that without this friendly service, the unseemly manœuvres of Austrian diplomacy in 1908 would have been unsuccessful, and Austria-Hungary might not have embarked so rashly upon the anti-Serbian policy which brought her, nine years later, to the abyss into which she dragged both friends and foes.

The next Imperial Chancellor, Bethmann-Hollweg, followed the same course of 'Niebelungen loyalty,' although not immediately. On two occasions,[1] when a catastrophe seemed imminent, he was able to restrain his ally by timely interference, and so to delay, for a little, the final day of reckoning. I cannot say whether the credit for these instances of moderation should be given to the Kaiser or to his Chancellor; in any case they deserve to be noted, although their effect was but temporary. The time came when the ruling will in Germany abandoned the initiative and voluntarily submitted to its ally. 'Niebelungen loyalty' assumed such proportions and such obstinacy that all arguments of justice and reason proved powerless against it, and the fate of Europe was sealed.

It is clear, from what I have just said of those to whom it fell to administer the inheritance of Bismarck and preserve intact the edifice of the German Empire, that this task proved to be beyond their strength. Perhaps, realizing their weakness, his successors did not even attempt to grapple with the task, hoping that the prestige of the creator of German unity would guarantee for the Empire long years of undisturbed existence.

[1] In 1912, and again in 1913.

Bismarck's work was never criticized in Germany; it was accepted blindly, with perfect faith and servile admiration. The Empire remained as he had left it, outwardly still firm and imposing, despite the general law that man's work cannot endure for long without constant care and maintenance. Bismarck had built for the needs of his time, and in accordance with his own special views and abilities, without taking into account the fact that his political legacy would inevitably pass into less competent hands. This mistake is made by nearly all great men, creators of Empires, religious and political reformers, and founders of new social systems; they build according to their own ideas, forgetting that, sooner or later, they must leave their life-work unfinished, in the hands of men of ordinary calibre. Moreover, Bismarck's work, like that of any man who makes history, however much foresight he may possess, was necessarily calculated to meet the needs of his own time, and could not, therefore, be regarded as fixed and definitive. It required constant adaptation to changing circumstances, in which unforeseen events – to which he always assigned so large a share in human affairs – sometimes play a decisive part. If Bismarck could have lived through two human lives instead of one, he might perhaps have been pliant enough to prevent his creation from losing its vitality, and to adapt it to the spirit and demands of modern times. He would have changed the system of alliances upon which he had founded the foreign policy of Germany, and the precariousness of which he must certainly have realized. But his successors were incapable of such wisdom. They continued to live on the capital he had bequeathed to them, as though it were inexhaustible. When at last they noticed that, owing to the rapid disintegration of Austria-Hungary, Germany's political credit was decreasing, they began to seek safety in still-born combinations, as for instance, a German-Franco-Russian alliance, to which they had contrived to obtain the conditional consent of the Emperor Nicholas at Björke. I have already mentioned the attempts which they made to create a definite understanding with England – always the dream of German statesmen – but which failed because they were unwilling to pay the necessary price.

Meanwhile the development of the programme of *Welt-*

Politik, for which the forces of Germany, however great, were insufficient, and which demanded more reliable allies than the Dual Monarchy, continued on the same scale. It caused constant anxiety among the Powers of the Triple Entente, and compelled them to take extraordinary measures in order not to be hopelessly behind Germany in their military preparations. Russia's task was particularly difficult and complicated, especially, as I have already said, in the matter of strategic railways. These were quite undeveloped on our Western frontier, and we had only begun to improve them about a year before the war. These improvements, undertaken to enable us to meet the needs of a defensive war, were, alas, begun too late. This did not prevent the German Government from asserting that railway construction in Russia, in the years preceding the war, had been carried out with a view to an offensive war. It is enough, however, to glance at the map of Russia and her Western neighbours, to see that more than a decade of serious work, involving enormous expenditure, would have been necessary to bring Russia up to their level in this respect.

In addition to their military preparations, the Triple Entente prepared for a political struggle with the Central Powers; this grew more imminent every year, owing to Austria-Hungary's Balkan policy, which sometimes received open support from Germany, as in 1909, and was sometimes restrained by her – for instance, during the Balkan Wars. It was impossible to forecast events from day to day. Austria-Hungary's firm resolve to destroy Serbia was well known to all of us; but it was difficult to determine, at any given moment, the attitude of the decisive factor in the question of war or peace – the peaceful or warlike disposition of Germany.

In the autumn of 1913, there was a visible turn for the worse in the general European situation. The military mission of General Liman von Sanders to Constantinople indicated Germany's growing interest in Balkan affairs. In view of the expectations of the Viennese Cabinet in this direction, the mission could only be regarded as an unfavourable omen for peace.

One consequence of this step – which clearly indicated Germany's anxiety to acquire a dominant position on the Bos-

phorus – was that the Powers of the Triple Entente felt obliged to prepare for combined action, and to aim at a more exact definition of their mutual relations, in case events should develop in a manner dangerous to peace. Now that all the steps taken for this purpose have become public, every impartial person can convince himself, by a perusal of the original documents, of their strictly defensive character, and can realize the injustice of the imputations of aggressive aims made by the Central Powers against the Entente.

I do not remember, or rather, I do not know, whether the credit of discovering a policy designed to 'encircle' Germany must be given to the Kaiser, to Prince Bülow, or to another; but, from the Emperor and his immediate entourage downwards, every one in Germany believed in it. From the day when King Edward VII and Delcassé, the founders of the Triple Entente, realized the necessity, in the interests of European peace, of securing a counterpoise to the Austro-German Alliance – created twenty-five years earlier by Bismarck and completed in 1882 by the inclusion of Italy – conversations upon the danger of being 'encircled' by the Triple Entente never ceased in Berlin. The authorities in Berlin would not admit that this alliance deflected the political equilibrium of Europe in favour of the Central Powers; they did not foresee that sooner or later the other Great Powers, which it placed at a disadvantage, or even in danger, would inevitably be driven to organize a new political grouping designed to restore this equilibrium.

Eleven years after the Triple Alliance of the Central Powers, the Franco-Russian Alliance was formed, and after another eleven years, the 'Entente Cordiale' appeared, shortly followed by the Anglo-Russian Convention of 1907. Thus were laid the foundations of the Triple Entente, which, although never embodied in formal acts or treaties, proved itself thoroughly dependable in the hour of danger.

There are probably, even to-day, many people in Germany who cannot grow used to the idea that the Franco-Russian Alliance, and later the Triple Entente, are the legitimate outcome of the Triple Alliance. This explains the extraordinary success of the discovery, or rather the invention, of the famous theory of a policy of 'encircling' Germany, and accounts for

the Machiavellian designs attributed to King Edward and Delcassé.

I knew them both, especially the latter, and I can say without hesitation that, in spite of the difference in their position, political functions and personal character, they were both convinced advocates of peace, perhaps because they both realized what terrible calamities a European war would entail. The Triple Entente had no offensive plans; it only desired to prevent the establishment of a German hegemony in Europe, which would constitute a serious threat to its vital interests. It is not easy to contest this affirmation, or to pretend that the aims of the Triple Entente were not entirely legitimate.

In order to achieve these aims, there was no need to 'encircle' Germany – a term which, as its strategical origin indicates, suggests some idea of aggression. Such an idea was equally foreign to every member of the Entente. In German political literature and the German press, and in personal conversation with German diplomats whom I met in various places where duty took me, I frequently encountered this accusation against the Entente Governments – namely, that they intended to execute this famous 'Einkreisung,' and so to compass the downfall and destruction of Germany. These evil designs were attributed primarily to England, and after her, to France, in the person of Delcassé, and later on, of Poincaré. Russia was less seriously suspected, and was mainly accused of sympathy with, and sometimes of complicity in the crafty designs and actions of our friends; M. Isvolsky received most of the blame in this connection. But all my efforts to obtain some definite proof of the alleged desire of the Entente to destroy Germany were fruitless. I never heard anything more convincing than vague suspicions of treacherous intentions on the part of England or France, and various garbled accounts of facts well known to me, which gave an entirely erroneous impression. My emphatic denials, however, were useless; I never succeeded in dispelling the obstinate misunderstandings of my interlocutors. It is at any time painful to see people obstinately clinging to a false conception and refusing to listen to argument or persuasion; but in this case, the error was really dangerous, for it intensified the atmosphere of mutual distrust and ill-will which had prevailed in Europe

for many years before the outbreak of the terrible storm of 1914.

As I have said, the Austro-Hungarian scheme, devised before the murder of the Archduke Francis Ferdinand, and approved by the Kaiser and Bethmann-Hollweg on July 5, 1914, was extremely simple. It could be expressed in a few words: 'Crush Serbia, regardless of Russian interests (*ohne Rucksicht auf Russland*).' A vast political programme was involved in this brief formula. Any experienced statesman would have paused to consider its difficulties. In Vienna, it was decided upon with extraordinary rapidity, in one sitting of the Council of Ministers. Only one member, Count Tisza, opposed Count Berchtold's policy; but, on learning that the Emperor Francis Joseph had obtained the Kaiser's full consent to it, he withdrew his opposition and joined the majority. Full unanimity then reigned in the Council.

This momentous decision taken, preparations were begun for an attack on Serbia. Austria-Hungary impatiently awaited the moment when, with the support of Germany, she would be able to fall upon her small neighbour, whose strength she had, in her haste, under-estimated. For the rest, the inevitable conflict with Russia and other international complications did not trouble her in the least. Her invincible ally, Germany, who had promised support and urged her to take the offensive, was at hand to support and protect her. In order to make sure of her pretext for war, the ultimatum to Serbia was worded in such a way as to exclude all possibility of its being accepted. The dispatch sent to Berlin on July 18 by Prince Stolberg, Councillor of the German Embassy in Vienna, addressed to the Secretary of State, von Jagow,[1] is characteristic of Austrian mentality. I extract from it the following passages: 'In reply to my question, as to what would happen if once more nothing came of it (i.e. if Serbia accepted the ultimatum), Count Berchtold expressed the opinion that in that case Austria would feel obliged, when the time came for the practical execution of its various demands, to resort to a radical interference (*weitgehende Ingerenz*) in Serbian affairs – in other words, to find occasion for provoking a quarrel.' . . . 'Hoyos (Chief of Count Berchtold's Chancellery) has just told

[1] Kautsky's *Diplomatic Documents*. No. 87, page 113.

me that the Austrian demands are such that no State possessing the smallest amount of national pride or dignity could accept them.'

Everything had thus been foreseen. If Serbia rejected, as they deserved to be rejected, the Viennese demands, she would be exposed to an immediate attack. If she made up her mind to accept them, she would nevertheless be subjected to all kinds of quibbles and chicanery, which in the end would lead to an invasion by Austria. Serbia's fate was sealed: however she acted, she could not escape it.

When, on July 24, I was informed by the Austro-Hungarian Ambassador in St. Petersburg of the contents of the ultimatum, I naturally had no knowledge of the documents I have just quoted. Nevertheless, I realized, from the text of the ultimatum itself, what lay behind it. Implacable hostility was apparent in every line of this unprecedented document. I had no reason to conceal my impression from Count Szapary. I told him that I did not for a moment doubt that it was Austria-Hungary's intention to find a pretext for war with Serbia, as she had clearly placed any withdrawal out of her own power by putting forward such unreasonable demands. I added that Austria-Hungary's reckless policy would cause a European conflagration.

On the same day, and under the same circumstances, Sir Edward Grey declared to Count Mensdorff, the Austro-Hungarian Ambassador in London, that 'he was very anxious that peace should be preserved between the Great Powers.' He also told Prince Lichnowsky, Count Mensdorff's German colleague, that 'if Austria-Hungary invaded Serbian territory, the danger of a European war would become acute.' Lichnowsky himself described the impression produced in England by the ultimatum as 'overwhelming.' The representatives of Austria-Hungary in Paris and Rome had to listen to similar opinions. There was thus no lack of warning, but the Emperor Francis Joseph, Count Berchtold, and General Conrad von Hoetzendorf were prepared for this, and did not swerve from the course they had mapped out with the approval of Germany, and which they hoped would restore Austria-Hungary to her former power and glory.

I have already mentioned that my first step was an attempt

to gain time, by appealing to Vienna to extend the time-limit of the ultimatum by forty-eight hours, and that I received a curt refusal, which the Austro-Hungarian Government did not even trouble to explain. My appeal received no support in Berlin. In exchanging views with the Serbian Minister in St. Petersburg, I told him that, from a practical point of view, I could give his Government no better advice than that they should accept the Austrian demands, save those concerning the sovereign rights of Serbia, which no Government could accept unless it wished to see its country exchange independence for vassalage. I transmitted the same advice by telegraph to Belgrade. M. Pashich, on whose firmness and wisdom I could entirely rely, was then at the head of the Government. Only a man who held the position that he did in Europe, and who enjoyed unquestioned authority in his own country, could be called upon to carry out such a measure. Pashich proved equal to the terrible responsibility which the situation entailed; he had the courage to make a sacrifice which, as I thought at the time, might have saved his country from speedy and brutal chastisement.

Serbia accepted all the demands of the Austrian ultimatum, except that which stipulated that Austro-Hungarian officials should take part in the inquiry into the alleged complicity of the Serbian authorities in the Sarajevo crime. Even this reservation held good only if the participation of the Austro-Hungarian officials in the inquiry was not in accordance with the usages of international law. At the same time, M. Pashich expressed his readiness to submit the Serbian case to the decision of the International Court of Justice at the Hague, in the event of the Viennese Cabinet making any further claims and demands. The bitter cup was drained to the dregs, and it seemed as though Serbia could go no further in submission to the tyrannical demands of her powerful neighbour.

In the course of these fateful days, the Serbian Crown Prince appealed to the Emperor Nicholas, from whom alone he could hope to obtain active help. This appeal frankly acknowledged the impossibility of self-defence, and begged for prompt co-operation. The Emperor, in a reply which indicated his sincere sympathy with the Serbian people and the

Crown Prince,[1] spoke of the strenuous efforts of the Russian Government to overcome the difficulties of the moment, and expressed his belief in Serbia's desire to find, without loss of dignity, some way out of the situation that would avoid the horrors of a new war. 'As long as there remains the faintest hope of avoiding bloodshed,' the Emperor's telegram concludes, 'all my efforts will tend in that direction. If we fail to attain this object, in spite of our sincere desire for peace, Your Royal Highness may rest assured that Russia will in no case remain indifferent to the fate of Serbia.'

This answer contained all that could be expected of the Russian Emperor at this critical moment. It clearly revealed his profound desire for peace, and at the same time showed his firm intention, shared by the whole of Russia, and openly declared from the beginning, not to allow Serbia to fall a victim to the Austrian plan of conquering the Balkan Peninsula. The question of the Austro-Serbian relations, as set forth by Count Berchtold, considerably exceeded the limits of a purely Balkan policy. The Austrian ultimatum, although accepted by Serbia – with the reservations already referred to, which could in no way be construed as a rejection – was but the first step towards her complete subjugation. This was apparent from its text, and even more so from the haste which the Austro-Hungarian Legation displayed in leaving Belgrade as soon as the Serbian reply had been delivered, thus showing its complete indifference to the nature of that reply. The rupture had already been decided upon. At the time, we only suspected this; now, the official publication of the Austrian and German diplomatic documents has proved it irrefutably. The absurd accusation of complicity in the murder of the only Hapsburg who showed any interest in the fate of the Slavonic subjects of the Dual Monarchy was obviously but a pretext for destroying the Serbian State, over whose ruins Austria-Hungary hoped to join hands with her protégé, Ferdinand of Coburg.

The idea of a new Balkan alliance, under the supremacy of the Central Powers, fostered by the Viennese Cabinet and supported by Berlin, is now an admitted fact, based on official

[1] Now King Alexander of Serbia

documents. It was to deliver the Slavonic East, bound hand and foot, into the power of Austria-Hungary, to exclude once for all from the Balkans the influence of Russia – the legacy of a century and a half of effort and sacrifice on behalf of the Balkan nations – to provide free access to Salonika for the Austrians, and to fulfil the fondly cherished dream of German *Welt-Politik* – the seizure of Constantinople. The definite installation of Germany on the Bosphorus and on the Dardanelles would have been the death-warrant of Russia, just as her settlement in Calais and Antwerp would have been a disaster for France and Great Britain.

The Government in Vienna had obviously foreseen the impression which the breach with Serbia was likely to produce upon the Russian Government and Russian public opinion. Accordingly the Austro-Hungarian Ambassador had received instructions to assure me, when handing to me the text of the ultimatum, that Austria had no intention whatever of annexing any part of the Serbian territory or of encroaching upon the sovereign rights of Serbia. These assurances sounded very strange, since the whole of the ultimatum was a revolting attack upon the political independence of Serbia; the Austrian promises therefore did not deserve the slightest attention. It is interesting to compare these false protestations with things said at the Austro-Hungarian Cabinet Meeting in Vienna on July 7, 1914, with regard to the inviolability of Serbian territory and its independence. I quote the following passage from the official protocol of the meeting printed in the Austro-Hungarian Red Book, published in 1919, to which reference has already been made: 'Passing to the discussion of the purpose of the military attack upon Serbia, the Cabinet adopted the opinion of the Hungarian Premier (Count Tisza) that Serbia, although reduced in size, should not, out of consideration for Russia, be destroyed altogether. The Austro-Hungarian Premier (Count Stürkgh) remarked that it would be desirable to do away with the Kara Georgevitch dynasty, giving the Serbian crown to some European sovereign,[1] and, at the same time, to make Serbia smaller territorially and, to some extent, dependent in a military respect upon the Dual Monarchy.'

[1] To wit, some German Prince.—*Author's note.*

This was what they understood in Vienna by inviolability of Serbian territory and respect for its independence.

The threat to declare war on Serbia within forty-eight hours of the ultimatum being delivered in Belgrade made it extremely difficult to carry on further negotiations, but this was precisely what the Austrian Government aimed at in making the time so short. Nevertheless, with the energetic support of our friends and Allies, I made every effort to continue the conversations. I could fully reckon upon the help of the French Government, knowing the peace-loving attitude that had prevailed in Paris ever since the beginning of the Balkan Wars; but it was still more essential for me to obtain forthwith an open declaration from the British Government about its solidarity with Russia and France on the Serbian question. It had been clear to me from the first that although the blow was dealt from Vienna, the only way to avert the terrible danger to the peace of Europe was to bring pressure to bear upon Berlin. I was convinced that the best and perhaps the only means to do so was to get a clear statement from the English Government. I had a vivid recollection of the impression produced everywhere, and especially in Germany, by Mr. Lloyd George's speech in 1911, when, owing to the Agadir incident, Europe was on the brink of war. A decisive statement on the part of the British Government of its solidarity with France had then been sufficient to dispel the gathering storm clouds.

I was profoundly convinced at the time, and am still convinced now, that had the British Government sided with Russia and France on the Serbian question from the first, Berlin would not have encouraged Austria in its policy of aggression, but would, on the contrary, have advised caution and moderation, and the hour of reckoning between the two hostile camps into which Europe was divided would have been postponed for years, if not for ever. In view of this I did my best in my very first interview with the English Ambassador, Sir George Buchanan, after the delivery of the Austrian ultimatum on July 23, to persuade him of the necessity of explaining our point of view to the British Government and obtaining its consent for the decisive step I was asking him to take. The English Blue Book of 1914 enables me to verify

my recollections of that first interview. It took place in the presence of the French Ambassador, Monsieur Paléologue, who energetically supported my arguments. When I telephoned to Sir George Buchanan asking him to come and see me, I said to him that my impression was that the step taken by Vienna meant war. During the interview I expressed my conviction that Austria would not have acted so aggressively without the consent of Germany, adding that I hoped the British Government would declare itself on the side of France and Russia without delay. Sir George Buchanan answered that the English interests in Serbia were almost nil and that public opinion in England would never tolerate a war on Serbia's account. I pointed out to him that England ought not to forget that the interests of Europe as a whole were at stake, since the Serbian question was a European and not merely a Balkan question; England had no right to refuse to deal with the situation created by Austria. In his report to London the Ambassador said that M. Paléologue and I insisted on the British Cabinet declaring its complete solidarity with us and that he had expressed to me a hope that his Government might perhaps state in Berlin and in Vienna that Austria's attack upon Serbia would probably involve Russia, and consequently France and Germany, in the war, and that it would be difficult for England to remain neutral once the war became a general European one. I answered that if war broke out the English would be involved in it sooner or later, and that by not siding at once with Russia and France they merely made the war more probable. At the same time I expressed a hope that at any rate the King's Government would severely censure Austria's action.[1]

The next day after this interview I renewed my entreaties, since the ultimatum expired that very evening and delay was highly dangerous. I told Sir George Buchanan that, as I had heard from the Serbian Minister, Serbia intended to appeal to the Powers for help; I thought such an appeal might be useful. It seemed to me that no efforts ought to be spared for transferring the conflict upon an international ground, which would have been all the more proper because in 1908 Serbia promised to all the Powers, and not only to Austria,

[1] The Blue Book, French ed., p. 1, N. 4, pp. 14, 15, 17.

to maintain good relations with the latter, as was mentioned in the ultimatum of July 23. If Serbia appealed to the Powers, Russia was ready to stand aside, letting England, France, Germany and Italy settle the matter. It was possible, too, that besides appealing to the Powers, Serbia might submit its grievance to a court of arbitration. I confirmed to the British Ambassador that Russia had no militarist designs and would never undertake anything unless she were driven to it. The action of Austria-Hungary was, as a matter of fact, directed against Russia as much as against Serbia and aimed at destroying the *status quo* in the Balkans and establishing its own hegemony there. If England firmly took its stand with France and Russia at once, there would be no war; if, on the contrary, England did not support us, rivers of blood would be shed and finally she would be involved in the war just the same. The unfortunate thing was that Germany firmly believed she could reckon upon England's neutrality. In conclusion I said to the Ambassador that Russia could not let Austria crush Serbia and become the leading Power in the Balkans, and that if France supported us we would not be deterred by the risk of war. I repeated once more that we had no desire to provoke a conflict, but that if Germany did not restrain Austria the position would become hopeless.[1]

It had appeared to me hopeless from the very first moment, for it followed with a logical inevitability from the events of the two preceding years; but I little thought at the time that I should find one day in German and Austrian sources a literal confirmation of my conjecture.

As I have just said, had England definitely sided at the time with Russia and France, Germany would have almost certainly induced Austria to moderate its claims and it would in that case have been possible to find a way out of the dangerous situation. Mr. Asquith, who in 1914 was the English Premier, refers, in his recently published Memoirs about the origin of the European War, to my negotiations with Sir George Buchanan, saying that 'to this day no serious proof has been adduced to show that a menacing or merely an irreconcilable attitude on the part of Great Britain would have caused Germany and Austria-Hungary to abandon their line of action.' I do not

[1] The Blue Book, p. 1, N. 9, pp. 29–31.

know whether these words correctly express Mr. Asquith's meaning, for I have not seen the English text and quote from a French translation.[1] In any case it seems to me that, in making this statement, Mr. Asquith must have forgotten the English intervention in the conflict between France and Germany in 1911 which threatened to be no less dangerous to the peace of Europe than the Austro-Serbian conflict in 1914. There can be no doubt that this intervention had produced the happiest results, since even somewhat chauvinistic German statesmen, such as Admiral von Tirpitz, admit that the English intervention was responsible for the diplomatic defeat of Germany, even though they disclaim that Germany had any aggressive intentions. This happy precedent might have been expected to carry weight with Mr. Asquith, for the English generally attach great importance to precedent in every domain of the political life of their country. Besides the report of Sir Edward Goschen, the English Ambassador in Berlin, telling of the circumstances in which England declared war on Germany after the violation by the latter of Belgian neutrality, makes it hardly possible for anyone to suppose that Herr Bethmann-Hollweg had foreseen that England would enter the war. This famous report makes it perfectly clear that the English declaration of war was a terrible surprise to the German Chancellor. We have therefore a right to suppose that a warning in due time from the English Cabinet would have had a sobering effect upon Germany. It is, of course, impossible to prove that a thing which did not happen would have had such and such consequences, but there is strong presumption in favour of the view upon which I laid stress in St. Petersburg, while M. Poincaré, quite independently of me, defended it in Paris.[2] The fact that the British Government refrained from any decisive step at that anxious moment was all the more distressing and incomprehensible, because neither in France nor in Russia did anyone entertain the slightest doubt of England being genuinely anxious to prevent a European war. The proof of this was that Mr. Asquith's Liberal Government, true to its party traditions with regard to foreign policy, was then in power and that a man of Sir

[1] *Le Temps*, Aug. 20, 1923.

[2] The report of Sir Francis Bertie, The Blue Book, N. 99.

Edward Grey's moral character, and a convinced pacifist, was England's Foreign Secretary.

With deep anxiety I was compelled to admit that the first steps taken by the Russian Government towards settling the Austro-Serbian conflict had not led to the desired results, in spite of Serbia doing all that we had expected of her and, indeed, going much further than we could have hoped. England declined to make the statement we asked for and thus to render clear and definite the confused and dangerous situation created by the Central Powers; the German Government talked of the necessity of localizing the Austro-Serbian conflict and of Germany's intention to support her ally in every way – which merely served, of course, to make the crisis more acute by encouraging the stubborn attitude of Austria. On July 23 von Jagow assured our *Chargé d'Affaires* in Berlin that he knew nothing about the contents of the Austrian ultimatum, although it has transpired since that Tchirshky had communicated to him the full text as early as July 21.[1] Von Jagow had telegraphed the same thing to Prince Lichnowsky.[2] It is hard to understand what need there was to mislead not only the enemy but also one's own representatives.

In Paris they had realized from the very first the European significance of the conflict and were not deceived by its Balkan origin.

There was nothing left for us but to continue with fresh vigour our efforts to paralyse the evil will of Austria and to arrange that the impossible demands of the Vienna Cabinet should be submitted to the Powers for revision even after the diplomatic relations between Austria and Serbia had been broken off on July 25. Difficult as it was, in view of this, to continue negotiations, I decided that at the Council of Ministers' meeting, which was to be held under the presidency of the Tsar on July 26, I would insist upon the necessity of so doing and informed the French Ambassador of this the day before.

Convinced that the Italian Government disapproved of the Austro-Hungarian action I instructed our Ambassador in

[1] The Austro-Hungarian Record, N. 47, p. 119.

[2] German Diplomatic Records collected by Kautsky, N. 126, pp. 146–7.

Rome, Krupensky, to beg the Marquis di San-Giuliano openly to say in Vienna that he disagreed with the Austrian policy and to explain to Berchtold that it would be impossible to localize the conflict and that Russia would be bound to support Serbia.

As I subsequently learned, Italy had been from the very beginning of the Austro-Serbian conflict strongly opposed to the attitude taken up by the Vienna Cabinet towards Serbia. The Austrian intention to drive Serbia into an impasse had been carefully concealed from Italy and when it became known in Rome it excited great anxiety and disaffection. Several days before he received my communication the Marquis di San-Giuliano had informed the German Ambassador that in his opinion Austria was not entitled to make protests to the Serbian Government about the assassination of the Archduke Ferdinand, for the crime was committed by an Austrian subject. Persons closely connected with the Italian Minister of Foreign Affairs openly said that if Austria made immoderate demands she would place herself in an unfavourable position and could not reckon upon the support of Italy. San-Giuliano avoided a direct exchange of opinions with the Austrian Ambassador in Rome, but did not conceal his views from the German Ambassador, von Flotow, whom he informed that Italy would not, under any circumstances, take part in a policy of crushing small nations. Flotow conscientiously reported to Berlin that the Italian Government would be hardly likely to support the Austrian demands, for in doing so it would run contrary to the deep-rooted sentiments of the Italian people.

Von Flotow's reports caused some anxiety to the German Foreign Office, but did not change by a hair's-breadth its attitude of sympathy and encouragement towards the policy of Vienna.

At the same time as I communicated with Rome I asked Count Berchtold to allow the Austro-Hungarian Ambassador in St. Petersburg to go over the text of the ultimatum privately with me and by mutual consent to alter certain points in it which seemed to me impossible of acceptance.

After waiting for forty-eight hours I received Berchtold's answer in which he informed me, through our Ambassador in Vienna, that he could neither take anything back nor enter

into any discussion of the text of the Austrian ultimatum. He also asked Count Szapary to tell me that in his conversation with M. Shebeko he made it perfectly clear that such a proposal was utterly out of the question.

The news from Berlin was no better. Jagow told our *Chargé d'Affaires*, M. Bronevsky, that, like Pourtalès, he thought there was nothing to prevent the Austrian Ambassador and me from continuing our negotiations, but when Bronevsky asked him to exercise a conciliatory influence upon Vienna, he answered that he could not advise Austria to give in.[1]

At the same time that I made my suggestion, Sir Edward Grey proposed the mediation of four Powers that were the least interested. His offer was the outcome of my saying to Buchanan that the Russian Government was ready to stand aside if four great Powers would mediate between Austria and Serbia, assembling in London under the presidency of Sir Edward Grey for the purpose, while Austria and Serbia postponed all military preparations until their deliberations were concluded.

Sir Edward Grey's proposal was inspired by a sincere desire for peace on the part of the English and Russian Governments and was immediately accepted by the French. A point in its favour was that the Powers asked to mediate between the conflicting parties would have included in equal proportions the representatives of the Triple Alliance and the Triple Entente and any partiality would thus have been excluded. Nevertheless, this offer, too, was received in Berlin no better than the two preceding ones. The French Ambassador in Berlin, M. Jules Cambon, submitted, at the suggestion of the French Government, that the following communication – purposely vague and non-committal – should be sent to St. Petersburg and to Vienna: 'to refrain from all action likely to make the situation more grave.'[2]

Both Sir Edward Grey's offer and M. Cambon's suggestion were definitely rejected by Bethmann-Hollweg and von Jagow. By way of answer to the German refusal, the British Fleet was kept assembled after the North Sea manœuvres. In taking this measure Sir Edward Grey told the Austrian Am-

[1] The Orange Book, French ed., N. 38, p. 54.
[2] *Ibid.*, N. 39, p. 55.

bassador that England had no intention of calling up reserves, and that the measure taken with regard to the Fleet contained no threat, but that in view of the danger of a general European war the British Government did not think it advisable to scatter its forces.[1]

If the order to the Fleet was not to be interpreted as a threat to Germany, there could be little doubt that Sir Edward Grey's words, addressed to Count Mensdorff, contained a serious warning. In Berlin and Vienna, however, they were regarded merely as an attempt at intimidation.

On the day when Berchtold refused my offer to continue negotiations with the Austro-Hungarian Ambassador in St. Petersburg, i.e. on July 28 (new style), Austria declared war on Serbia and attacked the Serbian flotilla on the Danube. It was expected in St. Petersburg that mobilization orders would be issued by Austria at any moment. On July 26 our Consul in Prague informed me that a mobilization decree had been made, though not as yet officially proclaimed; obviously it was to be followed by a general mobilization order which, indeed, was signed on July 28, the day that war was declared on Serbia.

Realizing that the situation was growing worse and worse, I sent the same day the following telegram to Count Benckendorff in London: 'My interviews with the German Ambassador confirm my impression that Germany is in favour of the uncompromising attitude adopted by Austria. The German Cabinet which could have prevented the crisis appear to be exercising no influence upon their ally. Germany finds the Serbian answer unsatisfactory. It seems to me that England, better than any other Power, could still try to induce the German Government to take the necessary steps. There is no doubt that the key of the situation is to be found at Berlin.'[2]

On July 28 I received a telegram from our Consul-General at Fiume, telling me that a state of siege had been declared in Slovenia, Crotia and Fiume, and that all reservists had been called up.

Austria's declaration of war on Serbia at the very time when Russia was using every effort to settle the conflict by

[1] The Blue Book, N. 48.
[2] The Orange Book, N. 43, p. 60, m. 61.

means of negotiations and friendly arbitration of the Powers made the Russian Government and the public realize more and more clearly that an armed conflict with Austria was inevitable. In St. Petersburg the conclusion was reached that it was necessary to take suitable measures of precaution, so as to avoid the danger of being taken unawares by the Austrian preparations. The Council of Ministers, under the presidency of the Tsar, decided to mobilize without delay four military districts, that is, some thirteen Army corps altogether, destined to act against Austria-Hungary, and in the morning of July 29 the mobilization order was issued in the usual manner.

On July 28 I telegraphed to Berlin instructing Bronevsky to inform the German Government of the military measures taken by us in consequence of the Austrian declaration of war, saying that 'not a single one of them was directed against Germany.' I made the same statement, verbally to the German Ambassador, who told me, in the Chancellor's name, that his Government had never ceased to exercise a moderating influence in Vienna and intended to do so even after the war had been declared. After thanking Count Pourtalès for this communication I told him that our order for the mobilization of the four military districts did not prejudge the question of war with Austria, but was due to the mobilization of the greater part of the Austrian army. At the same time I expressed the opinion that for the sake of trying every means of peaceably settling the conflict it would be a good plan to appeal to the arbitration of four Powers not directly interested and at the same time to carry on direct negotiations between Russia and Austria. I added that in view of the concessions made by Serbia it should not be difficult to find a basis for compromise, provided, of course, that there was a certain amount of goodwill on the part of Austria and of help in this respect from all the other Powers. At the time of this conversation with the German Ambassador I did not yet know that Berchtold had already definitely refused my proposal to continue direct negotiations with Vienna. I did not know either that Germany would refuse on formal grounds the mediation of the four Powers. Even after this refusal, however, the French and English Foreign Secretaries, as well as

myself, went on receiving from the German Government assurances that it had never desisted from exercising a conciliatory influence in Vienna. In what way it exercised this influence we did not, of course, know. Since then, however, the German secret documents have been published and we gather from them that Serbia's highly conciliatory reply to the Austrian ultimatum made Kaiser Wilhelm sincerely anxious, it seems, to bring the Austrian Cabinet to reason and to persuade them to be content with the diplomatic success achieved. At any rate in his letter to Herr von Jagow, Wilhelm II said quite unambiguously, 'now that Serbia has given in all grounds for war have disappeared.' But, distrusting the Serbs' sincerity, he suggested that Austria should 'take Belgrade by way of a pledge' or temporarily occupy some other part of Serbian territory 'just as we (Germany) left our troops in France until the milliards were paid.' Under such conditions, the Kaiser said he would be ready to offer his mediation to Austria.

I do not know whether this mood was deep and lasting; there is reason to doubt this. With superficial and impressionable people like Wilhelm II a mood seldom lasts beyond the moment which gives rise to it. In any case we heard nothing more about any serious attempts on the Kaiser's part to use his personal influence with Austria in the cause of peace. The efforts which he mentions in his telegrams to the Tsar were of no significance at all and should be regarded merely as a figure of speech. Had it been otherwise he probably would not have described as 'senseless' the Tsar's idea of letting the Austro-Serbian conflict be tried by the international arbitration Court at The Hague.

Be that as it may, this passing access of good feelings found no support among the leaders of Germany's foreign policy. During the critical days of July, Bethmann-Hollweg's chief concern – as shown by his correspondence with Tchirshky – was not to preserve peace but rather to handle events in such a manner that war should appear to have been forced upon Germany.[1] The attack upon Serbia had been prepared in Vienna with a striking rapidity, diplomatic relations were broken off exactly forty-eight hours after the ultimatum had

[1] German Records collected by Kautsky, p. II, N. 337, p. 5.

been delivered; the declaration of war followed three days later; in another twenty-four hours the bombardment of Belgrade took place, apparently so as to prevent all possibility of drawing back. All this led one to suppose that the military preparations of the Dual Monarchy had been completely finished and that it was merely waiting for the opportunity of invading the enemy's territory. And yet the news was suddenly received in Berlin that Austria could not begin operations till another fortnight had passed, i.e. not earlier than August 12. Such unforeseen delay put Germany into an extremely awkward position, as we learn from the Chancellor, Bethmann-Hollweg's letter to the German Ambassador in Vienna. The situation might well appear comical had not such tragic issues been involved. The Chancellor bitterly complained to Tchirshky of the delay, saying that during this long interval the German Government would run the risk of persistent offers of mediation or international arbitration; if it continued to reject such offers the serious reproach of causing the world war would be levelled against it by public opinion at home. Under such conditions it would be impossible to conduct a victorious war on three fronts.[1] 'It is therefore imperative for us,' adds the Chancellor, 'that the responsibility for the struggle between the countries not immediately concerned in the conflict should, in any case (*unter allen Umständen*), fall upon Russia.'

At the end of the letter the Chancellor instructs the Ambassador to insist upon Berchtold's once more assuring the Russian Government that Austria had no desire to annex Serbian territory, without, however, creating the impression that Germany wished to restrain Austria. It was essential to counteract the British propaganda without involving Germany in the war, or, should the war break out, to fight it under favourable conditions.

What is one to say about such instructions? They clearly reflect Bethmann-Hollweg's whole policy, indefinite and wavering, not based upon any clearly conceived purpose or any exact knowledge of the European situation in general. One may go even further and say that never perhaps has a statesman, called upon to direct the foreign policy of a great

[1] Kautsky, p. II, N. 323.

Empire at the time of a serious international conflict, been less capable of correctly estimating the situation of the moment as well as the relations that had arisen between the nations of Europe during the last fifty years. It is quite impossible to explain his innumerable blunders by a bellicose temperament or a morbidly exaggerated national feeling such as we find among many German statesmen, politicians and men of learning. Bethmann-Hollweg was a peace-loving man by nature, free from chauvinism or vanity. He did not seek pretexts for war, and probably did not wish it, but when, through the folly of his allies, he was faced with it he did nothing to drive away the terrible phantom. A weak man, he obediently followed the path into which he had been pushed by the Austro-Hungarian Government without realizing clearly whither it led him, but hoping at the same time to derive some benefit from the wrong done by somebody else. He was afraid to take upon himself the responsibility for that wrong and did his utmost to charge others with it.

The essential blunder of German statesmen lay in the fact that in their pursuit of the ambitious aims of a world-policy, they had forgotten the wise rule of Bismarck not to seek the unattainable. They imagined that Germany and her ally, who was eaten up with an internal canker, could with the means at their command create a *Mitteleuropa*, i.e. establish German hegemony over the continent of Europe and build up what in one of my speeches in the Duma I had called the German Khalifate – a fantastic empire extending from the banks of the Rhine to the mouth of the Tigris and the Euphrates. In other words, they had lost all sense of proportion and of correlation between ends and means. Both Wilhelm II and his Chancellor suffered from a mania of persecution, which led them to believe that their neighbours sought to form a hostile ring round Germany, but it never occurred to them that the Triple Entente and other Powers might feel apprehensive of Germany's attempts to carry out her 'world-policy' when there arose an international conflict involving the interests of Germany or Austria, as repeatedly happened in the twentieth century. For many years the German press and many persons closely connected with the Government openly proclaimed a political programme which threatened the existence and the

independence of several European States, and frequently found an echo in official statements of the Cabinet and of the Kaiser himself; it is hard to believe that Germany failed to realize that in consequence of all this, the coalition which Bismarck had so feared for young Germany would arise of itself and make Germany's political ideal unattainable. Germany's neighbours naturally felt uneasy, and an incautious word or action on her part was sufficient to confirm their belief that she would take the opportunity of any international conflict for carrying into effect her dream of world hegemony. During the Austro-Serbian conflict the Berlin Cabinet behaved in a manner that gave abundant ground for the fears and suspicions of the Triple Entente Powers. The main characters in the tragedy of 1914 assure us that they did not want the war; one feels tempted to ask them how would they have behaved if they had wanted it?

I have already mentioned that the efforts at reconciliation made by the Tsar's Government and the British Foreign Secretary had not been successful. On July 28 Kaiser Wilhelm returned from his yearly cruise in the Norwegian fiords. Hearing of this the Tsar sent him a telegram entreating the Kaiser's help at the painful moment of Austria declaring an 'ignominious' war upon a weak neighbour. The indignation in Russia was intense, and the Tsar, who fully shared it, foresaw the moment when under the pressure of public opinion he would have to adopt measures that might lead to war. The Tsar asked Wilhelm II, in the name of their old friendship, to do all he could to stop his allies from going too far and thus prevent the calamity of a European war.

To this sincere and friendly telegram Wilhelm made, as was his wont, an exhaustive reply. He expressed, in the first place, a suspicion that the Tsar was charging him with the responsibility for what had happened, went on to reproach him for secretly menacing Germany, to explain the words an 'ignominious war' by the Tsar's Pan-Slavist views and to advise him to address himself directly to the Emperor Francis Joseph. In short the reply contained everything except what the Tsar had asked for – the promise, that is, to influence Vienna in the interests of peace.[1]

[1] Kautsky, p. II, N. 332.

Thus the Tsar's personal appeal to the Kaiser asking him to intervene in the Austro-Serbian conflict had as little success as the conciliatory attempts made by Sir Edward Grey and myself. Nevertheless, the British Foreign Secretary, at my request, took fresh steps and asked the German Government themselves to indicate the conditions under which the four of the less interested Powers might arbitrate between Russia and Austria. In his readiness to placate the Vienna Cabinet Sir Edward Grey went further than the Russian Government, which had insisted that military operations against Serbia should cease pending the deliberations of the arbitrating Powers: he suggested that Austria should occupy certain parts of Serbian territory until it obtained satisfaction, on condition, however, that it should refrain from further advance until the arbitrating Powers had pronounced their final judgment.

We did not object to this new offer, although it conceded to Austria more than Russia could have been expected to concede.

The conversations I had had meanwhile with the German Ambassador gave me grounds to hope that this time the German Government would at last consent to use its influence in Vienna and persuade Berchtold to be more amenable. On the morning of July 29 we had not yet heard of the Austrians having crossed the Serbian frontier, but at the Army Headquarters news was continually arriving about the mobilization on the Russian frontier in Galicia; we heard that the mobilization there had begun a few days earlier and, so far as we knew, must have been completed. According to Count Pourtalès, Germany still insisted upon St. Petersburg entering into direct negotiations with Vienna, but Vienna persisted in her refusal to do so. As to the arbitration of the Powers, the German Government obstinately maintained that Austria could not accept it. I did not know at the time, and am not able to say now, to what extent German influence made itself felt in Vienna. But it may be confidently asserted that Austria kept urging the German Government to announce to us its intention to mobilize if we continued our preparations for war. Germany behaved with the self-denial she generally showed where Austria was concerned and conscientiously carried out

this request: on July 29 the German Ambassador came to tell me that the German Government had decided to comply with the wishes of Austria.[1]

Count Pourtalès' communication was couched in the impressive terms that Germany's representatives generally adopted for transmitting their Government's messages, often giving them the form of an ultimatum. Pourtalès, however, called his communication a friendly warning (*eine freundliche Mahnung*).[2]

On the same day I dispatched the following telegram to M. Isvolsky in Paris and to our other representatives to the Great Powers: 'The German Ambassador has told me to-day that his Government have decided to mobilize if Russia does not stop her military preparations. We have begun the latter solely in view of the Austrian mobilization and of her obvious reluctance to agree to any peaceable settlement of her conflict with Serbia. Since we cannot possibly comply with Germany's wish, there is nothing left for us but to hasten our own military preparations and to reckon upon the war being, in all probability, inevitable. Be so good as to warn the French Government and at the same time to thank it for the statement made to me by the French Ambassador that we can fully rely on the support of our Ally, France. In the present circumstances this assurance is particularly valuable to us.' [3]

The Tsar had been following, with perhaps greater anxiety than any other member of the Russian Government, every step of the Powers involved in the European crisis, and thinking out every possible means of saving Europe from the universal conflagration; on the day that I despatched the above telegram to Isvolsky, the Tsar sent one to Kaiser Wilhelm. I quote the concluding words: 'It would be fair to submit the Austro-Serbian conflict to the decision of the Hague tribunal. I trust to your sagacity and your friendship.' [4]

One cannot help admiring the Tsar's simple words, so full of a profound love of peace and of noble confidence. The only answer they evoked was an expressive exclamation such as is

[1] Austria. Red Book, French ed., N. 46.
[2] *Bâle News*, Sept. 21, 1917.
[3] The Orange Book, French ed., N. 58.
[4] Kautsky, N. 366.

used by the common people in Berlin, written in Wilhelm's own hand on the margin of the telegram. It is generally known that the idea of arbitration was regarded in Vienna, and consequently in Berlin, too, as absolutely inadmissible, for there was every probability that arbitration would have frustrated Austria's plans as well as the hopes based upon them. It should be noted that for reasons which are not hard to guess the German White Book, while giving other telegrams of the Emperor Nicholas to Wilhelm II, does not contain a single word about this one. It was published in the Russian *Government News* six months after it had been dispatched. I remember how surprised all the allied and many of the neutral Governments were when the telegram appeared in print. Their representatives in St. Petersburg asked me how a document of such importance could have remained unknown to anyone for half a year. The answer was very simple: I myself had known nothing about it. The Tsar, weighed down by his anxiety to preserve the peace of Europe, had sent the telegram straight from Peterhof to Potsdam, and then, overwhelmed by the number of matters he had to attend to, forgot to give it to me until he accidentally found it among his papers in January, 1915.

July 29 was a critical day for the negotiations which had preceded Germany's declaration of war against us. On that day we learned for a fact that an armed conflict between Austria, Russia and France was inevitable. It would have been impossible to say it to us more plainly than the German Ambassador had done during his conversation with me. Austria mobilized her forces against Serbia, upon which she had declared war, and on the following day began the bombardment of Belgrade. Against Russia she mobilized eight army corps, and in reply we, too, mobilized on the Austrian frontier. In the three northern military districts intended for acting against Germany not a single reservist had been called up. Germany was officially informed of this both by the Minister of War and by me, and her military representatives in St. Petersburg knew it perfectly well as can be seen from their published reports to their Government. Because we mobilized against Austria by way of precaution and in response to her mobilization, Germany threatened to mobilize her army

against us, with the warning that this would mean war (*dies würde aber den Krieg bedeuten*).[1]

What was there left for Russia to do but to prepare for a general mobilization – obviously, as the Tsar had personally told the Kaiser, not for the sake of attacking Germany, but in order to be ready for any sudden emergency which might be particularly dangerous to us in view of the slowness of our mobilization?

On July 30 nothing happened to clear the general situation, which was extremely difficult; indeed, the position seriously changed for the worse. The negotiations which the German and the Austrian Governments were in the meantime carrying on with the Governments friendly to us, and of which we were being kept *au courant*, helped to increase my anxiety.

My object is to give a brief account of events in which I took a personal part and thus enable my readers to form a correct view of the policy followed by the Russian Government during those tragic days; hence it is my rule to mention but cursorily the facts I learned from extraneous sources, even though they confirmed and justified the Russian diplomacy. I will, therefore, content myself with saying that by July 30 our conviction of a European war being inevitable, because of the attitude of the Central Powers, was shared not only in Paris and in London but also in Rome. In spite of every one being peaceably disposed, all the Governments realized the necessity for preparing in one way or another for the gathering storm. At the same time both we and our friends were determined to continue diplomatic negotiations so long as it was at all possible, since breaking them off meant war.

In spite of the extremely difficult position in which the obduracy of the Austrian Cabinet placed us, refusing, as they did, every one of my suggestions for a peaceable settlement, I nevertheless continued, with the entire approval of the Tsar, to try and come to an understanding with the Central Powers. I informed of this the French and the English Ambassadors, with whom I worked together in friendly confidence, since we were equally concerned to preserve peace. I told them that I would continue negotiations up to the last moment.[2]

[1] *Bâle News*, Sept. 21, 1917.

[2] The French Yellow Book, N. 54.

On July 30 I had another interview with the German Ambassador, in the course of which he asked me whether we would be content with Austria's promise to leave Serbian territory intact, and begged me to state on what conditions we should be ready to stop our preparations for war. I immediately wrote down on a piece of paper and handed him the following statement: 'If, admitting that the Austro-Serbian conflict has become a European question, Austria is ready to withdraw from her ultimatum the clauses which infringe upon the sovereign rights of Serbia, Russia will undertake to stop her preparations for war.'[1]

It would be hardly possible for a Great Power to give a stronger proof of its desire for peace than that contained in the formula I submitted to Count Pourtalès. Russia consented to stop her preparations for war if Austria merely renounced her attack upon Serbia's sovereign rights; she did not require that Austria should immediately stop her military operations against Serbia or demobilize on the Russian frontier. In making this offer I was really exceeding my powers, for I had no sanction for going so far in my negotiations with Germany and Austria, and I could only take upon myself the responsibility for it because I knew that in the eyes of the Tsar the sole limit to concessions for the sake of securing peace were the honour and the vital interests of Russia, and that the Russian Cabinet was no less peaceably disposed than the Emperor Nicholas II.

A few hours after I had made this statement to the German Ambassador I received a telegram from M. Sverbeyev, our Ambassador in Berlin, telling me that he had transmitted my offer to the Foreign Secretary at the same time as Count Pourtalès had done and that Herr von Jagow declared our offer to be impossible of acceptance for Austria.[2] Evidently the unanimity between the German and the Austrian Governments was so complete that one could speak for the other. Every hour that passed robbed us of our last hopes of preserving peace and the necessity for taking measures of self-defence grew more and more urgent.

On that same day I received another message from Berlin. Sverbeyev telegraphed to me that the decree for the mobiliza-

[1] The Orange Book, French ed., N. 60. [2] *Ibid.*, N. 63.

tion of the German Army had been signed. Without losing a moment, I passed this news to the Minister of War and to the Chief of the General Staff. I must confess that after my conversations with the German Ambassador I did not feel surprised. At midday on July 30 a special edition of the German official paper, the *Lokal Anzeiger*, was published, announcing the mobilization of the German Armies and Fleet. Sverbeyev's telegram, with the news, was dispatched to St. Petersburg a few minutes after the special edition appeared, and reached me some two hours later. Soon after sending the telegram Sverbeyev was called to the telephone and heard from von Jagow that the news about the German mobilization was not true. He again telegraphed to me at once, but this time his telegram was considerably delayed on the way. It is not clear to this day what exactly had happened about the German mobilization. One thing is certain – that the order appeared the day after the meeting of the Crown Council at Potsdam and was evidently connected with it. No one, of course, will be surprised to hear that in Russia the news was taken very seriously and that people believed in the mobilization decree being issued more readily than they did in its being rescinded. The German press is not unanimous on the subject. Official organs, or those supporting the Government, attach no importance to the mobilization decree, while the Opposition papers regard it as genuine. In any case the German Government itself admits that the decree had had some influence upon Russia's decision to mobilize on July 31. Thus Bethmann-Hollweg wrote to Prince Lichnowsky that in his opinion the Russian mobilization might be explained by the false rumours of the German mobilization which spread in Berlin on July 30 and which, though they were immediately contradicted, might have been transmitted to St. Petersburg.[1]

It was not, however, a case of rumours but of an official communication in a Government newspaper.

There is another aspect of this affair which has never been cleared up. The reason for the delay of Sverbeyev's second telegram by which, on von Jagow's authority, he contradicted his first, has never been ascertained. The explanation that naturally occurs to one is that the telegram was delayed

[1] Kautsky, p. III, N. 488.

on purpose. It cannot, of course, be proved, but many persons who commented on this circumstance in the press are agreed that the delay in the Russian Ambassador's telegram was not accidental, but was the work of the German Government which had intended thereby to cause the Russians to hasten with their mobilization under the influence of the first news in the *Lokal Anzeiger*, subsequently contradicted, and thus to make the Russian Government responsible for the war in the eyes of Europe and especially of the German public. I have no incontrovertible proofs of this, but the above interpretation deserves attention because, as has already been said, Germany was anxious for domestic reasons to put the blame for the European conflagration upon Russia.

But whether the *Lokal Anzeiger* communication was a manœuvre of the German Government or an indiscretion on the part of some one who had heard of the mobilization being contemplated, or, perhaps already begun, it was interpreted in St. Petersburg, in connection with the news coming from the frontier, to mean exactly what the German Chancellor had said in his telegram to the German Ambassador in London.

About two o'clock on July 30 the Chief of the General Staff, General Yanushkevich, telephoned to say that he had to speak to me concerning the latest news received at his Headquarters. He said that the Minister of War was with him and that they both asked me to look in. On my way to the Staff Headquarters, which is five minutes' walk from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, I fully guessed what I should have to hear. I found both Generals in a state of grave anxiety. From their very first words I realized that in their opinion peace could not be preserved any longer and the only safety lay in mobilizing the Army and the Fleet without delay. They hardly mentioned Austria, since she had no further surprises in store for us, her intentions about Serbia being perfectly clear, and also because the menace from Germany made the Austrian danger seem comparatively unimportant. General Yanushkevich said that the special information collected by the General Staff made him feel perfectly certain that the German mobilization had advanced much further than was generally supposed, and that, considering the quickness with which it could be carried

out,[1] Russia might find herself in an extremely dangerous situation if she mobilized partially and not as a whole. The General added that the war had become inevitable and that we were in danger of losing it before we had had time to unsheath our sword. I was too well acquainted with the German preparedness for war and with the defects of our military organization to doubt the justice of Yanushkevich's words. I merely asked him whether he had told all this to the Tsar. The Generals answered that the Tsar knew exactly how matters stood, but that they had not so far succeeded in obtaining his consent for a general mobilization decree and that it was with the utmost difficulty they had wrung from him the permission to mobilize the four Southern Districts against Austria after it had declared war on Serbia and bombarded Belgrade – and this in spite of the Tsar having told the Kaiser that our mobilization did not necessarily mean war. The difference between mobilization and war was clearly recognized at every stage of our military administration, and all foreign military attachés in St. Petersburg knew this perfectly well. During this memorable conversation General Yanushkevich told me that our mobilization might be put off for another twenty-four hours at the utmost, but after that it would be useless, for it could not be carried out properly; in that case he could not hold himself responsible for the consequences.

The moment was so critical that the Chief of the General Staff and the Minister of War begged me to telephone to the Tsar, who was in Peterhof, and try to induce him to give his consent to general mobilization.

I need not say with what feelings I regarded this request, repellent to my whole nature and way of thinking, and concerned with matters that were utterly foreign to me. Nevertheless, I consented to do what was asked of me, feeling that it was a painful duty which I had no right to shirk at a moment so full of terrible responsibility. I must make at this point a personal remark. I was by no means a friend either of General Sukhomlinov or of General Yanushkevich, and, at ordinary times, their opinion would not have been sufficient to make me change my judgment on a subject to which I

[1] In Moltke's phrase the German Army was always in the state of being mobilized.

attached serious importance. But now the case was different. In the first place, I had been quite prepared for what they told me, for the information which I had received, though less exact from the point of view of technical detail but obtained for the most part at first hand, confirmed my belief that the Generals were right in thinking that the war was inevitable and that it might break out suddenly at any moment. Secondly, I knew very well that neither General Yanushkevich nor General Sukhomlinov was eager for war or had any hatred for the Germans, which was sometimes found among our young officers, though less frequently at that time than immediately after the Berlin Congress at which the interests of Russia were betrayed by Bismarck to our perpetual enemy, Austria, and our enemy of the moment, England. A whole generation had grown up since then and our wound had healed. Extraordinary happenings were needed to make it open once more, and the events which were approaching with the rapidity of a thunder-storm had not yet penetrated into the minds of our Army. Besides, Russian haters of Germany were found only among the so-called political Generals – a type which had become almost extinct with the death of Skobelev and remained only as a harmless and insignificant survival. Apart from all these considerations, the tone of profound sincerity in which Yanushkevich and Sukhomlinov spoke and their deep anxiety for the national safety made me feel that I could not refuse their request, painful as it was to me to comply with it.

I telephoned to the Peterhof Palace. After several minutes of agonizing expectation I heard a voice which I did not recognize at once – the voice of a man obviously not used to speaking on the telephone – asking me who was speaking. I told the Tsar that I was speaking to him from the office of the Chief of the General Staff. 'What is it you wish?' asked the Tsar. I answered that I begged him earnestly to see me in the afternoon on urgent business. This time I had to wait still longer for a reply. At last the voice was heard again and said: 'I will receive you at three o'clock.' The Generals heaved a sigh of relief and I hurried home to change and left for Peterhof before half-past two, arriving there at the time appointed.

The Tsar was alone, and I was at once admitted to his study. I noticed at the first glance that he was tired and anxious.

After greeting me he asked whether I had anything against General Tatishtchev being present at our interview. Tatishtchev was going that very evening or the following morning to Berlin, where he had for years occupied a post of a General in the suite of the Emperor Wilhelm. I answered that I should be very pleased, for I had known the General for many years and was on friendly terms with him, but at the same time expressed a doubt as to whether Tatishtchev would be able to return to Berlin.

'You think it is too late?' asked the Tsar.

I had to say that I did.

The Tsar rang the bell and a minute later General Tatishtchev came in. He was one of the noblest and most devoted servants of the martyred Tsar, and his memory is revered both by his friends and by all who know the tragic story of his heroic death in Ekaterinburg together with the Imperial family.

I began my report at ten minutes past three and finished at four. I told the Tsar in detail my conversation with the Minister of War and the Chief of the General Staff, omitting nothing of what I had heard from them and mentioning the last news that had been received at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs from Austria and Germany and were still unknown to His Majesty. This news left no doubt whatever that during the two days I had not seen the Emperor the position had changed so much for the worse that there was no more hope of preserving peace. All our conciliatory offers, which went far beyond anything that a Great Power, whose resources were still untouched, could be expected to concede, had been rejected. The same thing happened about the offers made, with our consent, by Sir Edward Grey, which proved that the British Government was no less peaceably disposed than ourselves. I told the Tsar that I fully agreed with Yanushkevich and Sukhomlinov that it was dangerous to delay the general mobilization any longer, since, according to the information they possessed, the German mobilization, though not as yet proclaimed officially, was fairly advanced. The perfection of the German military organization made it possible by means of personal notices to the reservists to accomplish a great part of the work quietly and then, after the formal orders have been

issued, to complete the mobilization in a very short time. This circumstance gave a tremendous advantage to Germany, but we could counteract it to a certain extent by taking measures for our own mobilization in good time. The Tsar knew all this very well and he signified it by inclining his head without speaking. On the morning of July 30 he had received a telegram from the Emperor Wilhelm saying that if Russia continued to mobilize against Austria the Kaiser would be unable to intercede, as the Tsar had asked him. The decision rested, therefore, with the Tsar, who had alone to bear the responsibility for war or for peace. I had not yet seen that telegram and read it only in the Tsar's study. I could see from his expression how wounded he was by its tone and content. It contained nothing but threats, and there was not a single word about submitting the Austro-Serbian conflict to the decision of the Hague tribunal. If it had not been for the lucky chance to which I have referred already, no one would have known to this day that the Tsar had made that excellent suggestion.

After giving me time to read the unfortunate telegram carefully, the Tsar said, in an agitated voice: 'He is asking the impossible. He has forgotten, or does not wish to remember, that the Austrian mobilization had begun sooner than the Russian, and now asks us to stop ours without saying a word about the Austrian. You know I have already suppressed one mobilization decree and then consented only to a partial one. If I agreed to Germany's demands now, we should find ourselves unarmed against the Austrian Army which is mobilized already. It would be madness.'

The Tsar's words expressed exactly what I had thought and felt the day before, after the visit of the German Ambassador. I said so, adding that both Wilhelm II's telegram to His Majesty and Count Pourtalès's verbal communication pointed to one conclusion only – that war was unavoidable. It had been settled long ago in Vienna, and the German Government, which might have been expected to bring the Austrians to reason, had no wish to do so, demanding that we should capitulate before the Central Powers – a thing that Russia would never forgive to the Tsar, for it would cover with shame the good name of the Russian people. In the circum-

stances there was nothing left for the Tsar but to give orders for general mobilization.

The Tsar was silent. Then he said to me, in a voice full of deep feeling: 'This would mean sending hundreds of thousands of Russian people to their death. How can one help hesitating to take such a step?'

I answered that the responsibility for the precious lives carried away by the war would not fall upon him. Neither he nor his Government desired the war. Both he and they had done everything humanly possible to avoid it and were prepared to sacrifice a great deal of our national pride. He could say to himself, with a full conviction of being right, that his conscience was clear and that he would not have to answer either before God or his own conscience or the Russian people for the bloodshed of the terrible war, thrust upon Russia and Europe by the ill-will of the enemy, determined to increase their power by enslaving our natural Allies in the Balkans, destroying our influence there and reducing Russia to a pitiful dependence upon the arbitrary will of the Central Powers. She could only succeed in freeing herself from that condition at the cost of unspeakable efforts and sacrifices, utterly isolated from other Powers and having nothing but her own resources to trust to.

I had nothing further to add and sat opposite the Tsar, watching him intently. He was pale and his expression betrayed a terrible inner struggle. I was almost as agitated as he. The fate of Russia and of the Russian people depended upon his decision. Everything had been done, all means had been tried to avert the approaching catastrophe, and it all proved of no avail. We had either to unsheath the sword for the defence of our vital interests and to wait, fully armed, for the enemy's attack which had, during the last few days, become for us almost a palpable fact, or to refuse to fight, surrender to the enemy's mercy and perish in the end covering ourselves with everlasting shame. We were in an impasse. Our French Allies, who wished for war as little as we did, were in the same position, and so were our Balkan friends. Both knew that no choice had been left them and decided, with a heavy heart, to accept the challenge. All these thoughts flitted through my mind during the painful moments of waiting for

the Tsar's answer to what my reason and my conscience had prompted me to tell him. General Tatishtchev was sitting next to me; he had not uttered a word, but was, like me, in a condition of unbearable moral tension.

At last the Tsar said, speaking as it were with difficulty: 'You are right. There is nothing left us but to get ready for an attack upon us. Give then the Chief of the General Staff my order for mobilization.' I went downstairs where the telephone was and rang up General Yanushkevich to tell him of the Tsar's order. In answer Yanushkevich told me that his telephone was out of order. I understood the meaning of that phrase. He was afraid to receive by telephone an order countermanding the mobilization. His fears, however, were unfounded and the order was not countermanded either by telephone or in any other way. The Tsar had overcome the distressing doubts in his mind and his decision was irrevocable.

I will not say what I lived through in those awful hours, and how great was my anxiety about the issue of the terrible struggle thrust upon Russia, who was not ready for it. The Tsar thought of the war with an overwhelming aversion, and this feeling was shared by all persons responsible for the destinies of Russia. And yet after the German request for immediate demobilization made to me by Count Pourtalès on July 29, all we could expect was either some new and still less acceptable demand or an overt attack. The attitude taken by Germany at that decisive moment of the diplomatic struggle could only be explained by the desire of the Berlin Cabinet to hasten the war. This was the impression created in St. Petersburg, and it was the same in Paris and in London. In his conversation with the German Ambassador, Lichnowsky, Sir Edward Grey insisted that Germany should intercede with Austria, warning him in a manner that left no doubt whatever as to the English attitude towards the encouragement given by Germany to the truculent policy of the Vienna Cabinet, and the consequences bound to ensue therefrom.

Now, thanks to the Revolutionary Government of 1919 having published a collection of German diplomatic documents, we can look behind the scenes and learn at first hand what the state of mind of the chief characters on the Berlin stage really was. It must be admitted that the two of them who, one

would have thought, had the decisive voice – i.e. Emperor Wilhelm and the Imperial Chancellor – showed signs of correctly estimating the policy of Austria. We see this from the letter to which reference has been made already, written by Wilhelm II to Herr von Jagow under the first impression of the concessions made by the Serbian Government in reply to the Austrian ultimatum. In that letter he advises Austria-Hungary to be content with the diplomatic success achieved, not seeing any further reason for war. The same reasonable attitude characterizes the Chancellor's telegram of July 30 to the German Ambassador in Vienna. He expresses in it his regret that the Austrian Government had so obstinately refused all attempts at reconciliation, especially those made by England, and a fear that, in consequence, it might be difficult to lay upon Russia (*zuzuschreiben*) the blame for the European conflagration.[1] At the end of the telegram he repeats once more that he is afraid lest the Vienna Cabinet should prove by its conduct that it sought the war, and that Russia might thus come out guiltless (*schuldlos*), 'which would put us into an intolerable (*unhaltbar*) position towards our own people.' He winds up by insisting that the Vienna Cabinet should accept Sir Edward Grey's offer since it 'safeguards Austria's position in every respect.'

This telegram was preceded by another, sent a few hours earlier to that same Tchirshky, saying that it would be a serious mistake to break off negotiations with St. Petersburg, for it would mean a direct challenge to Russia; [2] and that Germany was ready to do her duty as Austria's Ally, though she refused to be drawn into a world war if Vienna was not going to take any notice of her advice.

One cannot fail to recognize that these telegrams contain sound advice, and an attempt to conciliate Austria, but at the same time it must be admitted that while, apparently, striving to prevent the Vienna Cabinet from taking an irremediable decision the German Government – as the documents quoted fully prove – was chiefly concerned to make Russia, and not Austria or Germany, responsible for the coming war. This was necessary to the Chancellor in order to justify his policy

[1] Kautsky, N. 396.

[2] German Records collected by Kautsky, N. 441.

in the eyes of the neutral countries and of his own people, so that they should not regard their Government as responsible for the war. The German Chancellor succeeded in the latter task, and a good many Germans are convinced to this day of Russia's aggressive designs upon their Fatherland. As to the neutral countries, Bethmann-Hollweg's efforts have been in vain, and few people outside Germany think that his policy was justified. Nevertheless, it must be granted that Germany had certainly done something to show Austria the folly of her policy, and I am inclined to think that the Kaiser had more share in this than his Chancellor; Wilhelm's motives were of a higher character than Bethmann-Hollweg's. But while admitting that the Berlin dispatches to Vienna did strike a conciliatory note – though rather late in the day – it is to be regretted that it was so weak and uncertain as to be completely drowned by the noise and clatter of the Austrian drums and trumpets. In 1914 Berlin had forgotten what tone ought to be used in speaking to Vienna in order to be heard there, and yet a year had hardly passed since a menacing shout from Berlin produced, under almost identical circumstances, a most salutary effect upon Vienna's bellicose mood.

These belated admonitions of Bethmann-Hollweg seem feeble enough, especially in view of his claim that he had never ceased to use a moderating influence upon Austria, who went on steadily preparing for war, while requesting Russia to discontinue her mobilization; but it appears that even these timid words were thought in Berlin to be superfluous. In Part II of Kautsky's edition of the German official documents we find the Chancellor's telegram telling Tchirshky not to pass on to Berchtold the earlier telegram (of which mention has just been made) about the necessity of continuing negotiations with St. Petersburg, so as not to give Russia a reason for preparing for war.[1] It is difficult to make out why the Chancellor should want to draw back after apparently realizing the danger of the general political situation – even if we make allowances for the incredible confusion, well described in Admiral von Tirpitz's memoirs, that reigned at the time in Wilhelmstrasse. The inconsistent and contradictory character of the German diplomacy that has had such terrible results was prob-

[1] Kautsky, N. 450.

ably due to deeper causes than those to which von Tirpitz ascribes it.

Bethmann-Hollweg's second telegram, cancelling the first, the more moderate one, is followed in the *Collected Records* [1] by a third, explaining that the first had been cancelled at the insistence of the General Staff, who maintained that Russia's preparations compelled Germany 'to take rapid decisions so as to avoid surprise.' On the day that telegram was dispatched, i.e. July 30, our preparations for war consisted, as already pointed out, in the mobilization of four Southern military districts – i.e. we were just as much prepared for war as Austria, which was already at war with Serbia. General mobilization orders were only issued in Russia on July 31, i.e. on the day that *Kriegsgefahrzustand* was declared in Berlin earlier in the day than they had received the news of our mobilization. This declaration of the 'state of war danger' differed from mobilization hardly in anything but name, and was a German trick for beginning the mobilization before the actual word had been pronounced.

There is reason to believe that the interference of the German General Staff with the Chancellor's telegram was due to this desire to take 'rapid decisions' the time for which, in the opinion of the German military authorities, had come. It may also be supposed that from that day the fates of Germany and, with it, of Russia, finally passed from the weak hands of the German diplomatists into the firmer hands of the General Staff.

On the following day, i.e. on July 31, Herr Bethmann-Hollweg sent one more telegram to Vienna in which the cancellation of the first one was explained no longer by the intervention of the General Staff but by the receipt of a telegram from the King of England to Prince Henry of Prussia.[2]

It would be very interesting to clear up this confusion and discover the true cause, but it is hardly possible to do so as yet, for we have not a sufficient number of the original documents at our disposal. And so for the present we have to accept as the most likely explanation the intervention of the General Staff, exasperated by the wavering and undecided policy of the German Government. Another probable explana-

[1] Kautsky, N. 451. [2] *Ibid.*, N. 464.

tion was the disorder which from the very beginning of the Serbian conflict had prevailed in the Imperial Chancellery. One felt that there was no single guiding will there, strong enough to prevent outsiders from interfering with foreign affairs. Even at the time when Bismarck was all-powerful the General Staff was so formidable an institution that the Iron Chancellor himself found it hard to overrule it. Since then, during the office of Bethmann-Hollweg and of the other short-lived Chancellors who succeeded him, the supreme organ of civil power gradually surrendered its position to its more powerful rival and finally ceased to be reckoned with.

Meanwhile, faithful to the promise I made to myself and to our Allies, and in compliance with the wishes of the Tsar, not to break off negotiations with the hostile Powers till the very last moment, I agreed with the alteration made by Sir Edward Grey in the formula I had drawn up at the request of Count Pourtalès. In that formula – immediately rejected by von Jagow – I said that if Austria gave up the demands incompatible with the dignity of Serbia as an independent Power, Russia would discontinue her mobilization. Sir Edward Grey's version went considerably beyond my statement, for he agreed to Austria temporarily occupying certain parts of Serbian territory and thus came near Kaiser Wilhelm's idea about 'Austrian hostages' in Serbia. Grey merely demanded that Austria should refrain from sending her troops any further; he trusted that the Powers would be able to satisfy the Austrian demands without infringing upon the sovereign rights of Serbia and the integrity of her territory.

Much as I disliked this new formula, I asked the Tsar's permission to accept it in the interests of the European peace, although I fully realized that being essentially unjust it could not lead to a proper solution of Austro-Serbian conflict or establish stable and satisfactory relations between the parties at dispute. In spite of his profound love of peace, the Tsar was unpleasantly surprised by Sir Edward Grey's new offer, and it was as difficult for me to persuade him to agree to it as it had been for me to decide to ask his consent.

We were thus compelled to fix as the limit of our concessions the integrity of Serbian territory and of her sovereign rights. Beyond this limit there loomed before us the dread-

ful spectre of the European War, which it had not been in our power to drive away in spite of all the sacrifices made by Russia and Serbia. There is nothing more painful than to adopt the path of sacrifice and renunciation while realizing that it will be of no avail.

My offer as amended by Sir Edward Grey – the fourth in number from the time that the Austrian ultimatum had been presented to Serbia – was made on July 31, i.e. on the day when Germany declared 'the state of war' and we issued orders for general mobilization. As I have already said, there was no essential difference between the two things, except that the declaration of 'the state of war' made it possible for Germany to mobilize without announcing it openly. But there was an enormous difference between the very conception of mobilization in Germany and in Russia. In Russia it was regarded not merely as a means of attack, but also as a means of self-defence, and in 1914 our mobilization was precisely of such a character. The Tsar had personally told the Emperor Wilhelm so in one of his telegrams pledging his word for the truth of the assertion and promising to do nothing against his neighbours so long as the negotiations with Austria continued. In Germany, however, mobilization immediately led to war as the German Ambassador had warned me. It can be seen from Bethmann-Hollweg's telegram to Tchirshky on July 30 that the General Staff insisted upon 'rapid decisions,' i.e. on mobilization, or, in other words, on war.

The wishes of the German military party were complied with in spite of a certain resistance on the part of Bethmann-Hollweg [1] and Herr von Jagow who tried to postpone the declaration of war, realizing, as Herr Kautsky says, that Germany was beginning the war under unfavourable circumstances from the international point of view.[2]

At midnight on July 31 the German Ambassador handed me the ultimatum in which Germany required us to demobilize within twelve hours the reservists called up against Austria and Germany. It would have been impossible, on technical grounds, to comply with this request, which was indeed simply

[1] Admiral von Tirpitz in his *Memoirs* contradicts this.

[2] K. Kautsky, *Comment s'est déclanchée la guerre mondiale*. Paris, 1921.

an act of bullying, since Germany and Austria did not promise that if we demobilized they would do likewise. Austria had by that time already completed her mobilization, and Germany began hers on that very day by declaring 'an imminent state of war' – or, if we believe Kurt Eisner, the head of the temporary Bavarian Government, who was assassinated later, she had begun it three days previously. And as though all this were not enough, the German ultimatum contained a request for an explanation from us about the military measures we had taken.

The German requests were, of course, utterly inadmissible both on formal grounds and in themselves. The military preparations of our Western neighbours were of the greatest danger to us, and the only way to dispel the danger would be for them to stop their mobilization at once. There is no need to add that our demobilization at that moment would have introduced a complete and hopeless disorder into our military organization, and our enemies would have immediately taken advantage of this to carry out their designs unhindered.

The German Ambassador was very much agitated when he handed the ultimatum to me and repeatedly insisted on the request for demobilization. I succeeded in remaining calm and in explaining to him, without irritation, the reasons why the Russian Government could not meet the wishes of Germany. I had been for several days prepared for this step on the part of the Berlin Cabinet; I clearly realized that the cause of peace upon which we had spent endless efforts was lost irretrievably, and that in a few hours the ultimatum would be followed by the last and final step resulting for the whole of Europe in a calamity of the extent of which the liveliest imagination could form but an inadequate picture.

When the time limit for our capitulation before the Central Powers was drawing to its close, the Austrian Government suddenly expressed its consent to resume negotiations with Russia – a consent it obstinately withheld so long as the negotiations were likely to be of some use. Berchtold's decision may have been due to German influence, as was said by the German Government, which published, a year too late,[1]

[1] This delay is so difficult to account for that it has led many persons to doubt the authenticity of the telegrams.

Bethmann-Hollweg's telegram to Tchirshky, advising the Vienna Cabinet to resume negotiations with us; or it may have been arrived at by him independently in view of the Austrian Army not being ready to fight even against Serbia, to say nothing of Russia; or it may have been mere camouflage, for they already knew for certain in Vienna that Germany was going to declare war against us and so could display a conciliatory spirit with impunity; in any case, this question presents no great interest now. Cannon thunder prevented the resumption of negotiations to which I had attached a practical importance only during the first stage of the Austro-Serbian conflict. The declaration of war on Serbia and the bombardment of Belgrade deprived them of any real significance, and I lost all interest in them, though, for reasons already indicated, I did not refuse to continue them. Negotiations could help nothing now, and there was no more reason for delay.

The last and irrevocable step was taken by Germany on Saturday, August 1. Count Pourtalès came to see me at seven o'clock in the evening, and after the very first words asked me whether the Russian Government was ready to give a favourable answer to the ultimatum presented the day before. I answered in the negative, observing that although general mobilization could not be cancelled, Russia was nevertheless disposed, as before, to continue negotiations with a view to a peaceful settlement.

Count Pourtalès was much agitated. He repeated his question, dwelling upon the serious consequences which our refusal to comply with the German request would involve. I gave the same answer. Pulling out of his pocket a folded sheet of paper, the Ambassador repeated his question for the third time in a voice that trembled. I said that I could give no other answer. Deeply moved, the Ambassador said to me, speaking with difficulty:

'In that case my Government charges me to give you the following note.'

And with a shaking hand Pourtalès handed me the Declaration of War. It contained two versions which, through an oversight of the German Embassy, were included in the same text. I did not notice this at the time, for the meaning of the

note was perfectly obvious and I did not have time at the moment to go over it word for word.

After handing the note to me, the Ambassador, who had evidently found it a great strain to carry out his orders, lost all self-control and leaning against the window burst into tears. With a gesture of despair he repeated: 'Who could have thought that I should be leaving St. Petersburg under such circumstances!'

In spite of my own emotion, which I managed to overcome, I felt sincerely sorry for him. We embraced each other and with tottering steps he walked out of the room.

Count Pourtalès had not always been successful as an intermediary between the German and the Russian Governments at a time critical for them both, and apparently gave the Berlin Cabinet an incomplete and one-sided account of the situation in St. Petersburg. I nevertheless believe that he was sincerely anxious to avoid a breach between his own country and Russia, not only from a natural love of peace but also because he realized what the consequences of such a breach were likely to be. When he had to take part in the drama, the picture of these consequences probably rose before his imagination so vividly that he was overwhelmed with despair at the thought that something irrevocable and too awful to conceive had been done. Had not Pourtalès been an exemplary Prussian official, I could have believed that at that moment there flitted through his mind a doubt as to whether he and his Government had done all that was possible to avert or, at any rate, to postpone the approaching catastrophe. But probably no such doubt assailed him. He never suspected at the time many of the things that came to light later, and, like most of his compatriots, believed that his Government was in no way to blame.

At eight o'clock the next morning the Ambassador, together with the whole staff of the Embassy and of the Bavarian Mission and eighty-two other German subjects, left St. Petersburg by a special train to go to Germany through Sweden. I note with pleasure that, owing to the care and foresight of the Russian Government and officials, the departure of the German Diplomatic Corps was perfectly orderly and decorous. It favourably differed in this respect from the departure of the

Russian Embassy and of some members of the Russian Colony who were insulted by the crowd in the streets of Berlin.

This was how the breach with Germany took place. Within three days she handed us two ultimatums requesting that we should discontinue at once the military measures we had taken to safeguard ourselves, without giving any reciprocal guarantee either for herself or for Austria; and when we refused to capitulate she declared war upon us. Her threats were directed against Russia, which was making superhuman efforts to avoid war and had begun to mobilize her army with the sole purpose of not being taken unawares; Austria, which had decided upon war long before with the consent of Germany, had not received from Berlin a single word of warning that might have saved Europe from the impending catastrophe. Germany had given up her freedom of action, had grown accustomed to the thought of war, and so would not, and could not, prevent it. This is the great sin of the German Government before its own nation and mankind.

Meanwhile we were not yet at war with Austria, which was to blame for the intolerable situation in the first instance. Since, at the last moment, the Vienna Cabinet had notified to us its desire to resume negotiations, the Russian Government gave no orders to its army to cross the Austrian frontier in view of the Tsar's promise not to violate peace so long as negotiations continued and there was the least hope to avoid war. Germany thus found herself in the position of having bared her sword for the defence of an ally who had not been attacked by anyone.

In Vienna they were in no hurry to declare war upon us. As already said, General Conrad von Hoetzendorff, who was chiefly responsible for the Emperor Francis Joseph's and his Government's decision to fight a war at all costs and with whomsoever it might be, was driven to the conclusion that the military forces of Austria-Hungary were by no means equal to the task, and that a war with Serbia alone, to say nothing of Russia, was a risky undertaking. This discovery must have been responsible for Austria's desire to resume negotiations with us, and thus gain a little time for completing her preparations for war. The indefinite position between war and peace could not continue long. In Germany the

dilatoriness of her 'brilliant second' [1] produced considerable irritation, and soon an advice that sounded like a command, came from Berlin to declare war on Russia, which Austria did six days later than Germany.

The belief of the Vienna General Staff that the Austrian Army was not ready was fully confirmed by the series of defeats which General Krobatin, the Austrian commander in Bosnia, suffered at the hands of the Serbs. Under the circumstances, therefore, Conrad von Hoetzendorff's eagerness for war would have been utterly incomprehensible had Vienna trusted to her own resources alone and not been absolutely certain of military help from Berlin.

But, indeed, there is no need to prove this now that so much has come to light. I had said at the very beginning of the conflict to our representatives, both in Germany and in the countries friendly to us, that the key to the situation was in Berlin.

Our Allies never doubted this but the German Ambassador in St. Petersburg indignantly denied the allegation, as insulting to his Government's honour. German nationalists deny it to this day, being still under the influence of the spell cast upon them during the first days of the war by the Kaiser's speeches and, still more, by articles in the patriotic press. The self-deception and hysterical excitement of the German masses, as well as of the Government circles and members of the reigning houses, was so great that they were not content to assert that Germany had been driven to a war of self-defence by Russia and her Allies, whose degree of responsibility varied, in popular imagination, from moment to moment; they went further and finally came to believe that Russia and France had declared war on Germany, completely forgetting the notes handed by the German Ambassador in St. Petersburg on August 1 and in Paris on August 3, the ultimatum delivered to Belgium on August 2 and the invasion of the Grand Duchy of Luxembourg. A clear instance of such forgetfulness and confusion is afforded by the speech of King Ludwig of Bavaria at the festival of the Bavarian *Kanal-Verein* jubilee. He said: 'France declared war upon us after Russia had done so, and when, finally, the English attacked us as well, I said to myself,

[1] This was how Kaiser Wilhelm described Austria-Hungary.

"I am glad of all this, glad, because now we shall be able to settle our accounts with our enemies." '

That the head of a German State, second in the Empire in size and importance, should utter a sentence like this is a clear proof of the strange mental disorder from which Germany suffered during the war. If the King of Bavaria could speak like this, what was to be expected from an ordinary German? The incredible capacity for self-deception to which the German people are liable in spite of their superior culture is evidently a psychological peculiarity of their own and is a factor of first rate political importance that has not been sufficiently appreciated hitherto, but will have to be reckoned with by Germany's neighbours in all their relations with that country.

CHAPTER IX

The Great War began on the Eastern front with the bombardment of Libau by the German Fleet, and on the Western by several violations of the French territory provoked, so the German Government alleged, by similar actions of the French troops in Germany. Some of the charges against France were utterly fantastic – for instance, it was said that French aeroplanes appeared over Karlsruhe and Nürenberg, throwing bombs to destroy the railway lines, and so on. These accusations, never proved or verified by anyone, had nevertheless served as an official pretext for declaring war on France on August 3. On the eve of that day the German Ambassador in Brussels handed a note to the Belgian Minister of Foreign Affairs demanding, under the threat of war, a free passage for the German troops through the Belgian territory, in order to prevent a French attack upon Germany across Belgium; the German Government claimed to possess unimpeachable information about such an attack having been planned. Belgium's dignified refusal to comply with this request was immediately followed by the invasion of Belgium by the German Army and its march upon Liège. This was Germany's first step in the occupation of Belgian territory, which it proceeded to overrun in spite of the heroic resistance of the Belgian Army, which was finally compelled to enter the territory of the French Republic. Stationed there it continued right up to the Armistice to take an active part in the military operations of the Allies against the Germans.

The arguments by which the German diplomatists had sought to justify the violation of the Belgian neutrality were highly artificial; as a matter of fact it had been planned and decided upon long ago. There was no shadow of reason for accusing the Belgian Government of complicity with the alleged hostile designs of France and England against Germany. This is clear from the fact that previously to the German invasion of Belgium, the sympathies of the Government and of the public in that country, so far from being on the side of France, actually inclined towards Germany with which Belgium was connected by economic interests and, to a great extent, by a racial bond.

The Belgian Minister in Russia, Count de Buisseret, with whom I have often spoken about his country as a factor in international relations, used to say that Belgium was neutral not only on political grounds, in virtue of its geographical situation between three great Powers, but also because of its historical past and the peculiarities of its national culture which saved it from being one-sided. Belgium's position, he said, compelled her to live on equally friendly terms with all her neighbours, not giving preference to any one of them and regarding as her enemy any nation that tried to interfere with her independence. '*Nous serons contre l'agresseur de quelque côté qu'il vienne*,' said the Minister. It was difficult to doubt the truth of these words, for they obviously reflected the true interests of a rich and cultured country, weak from a military point of view but certain of finding powerful allies in her struggle for independence. In Paris they understood this very well, and the French Government never dreamed of making use of Belgium for attacking Germany.

In Berlin, too, they must have known that it was risky to take advantage of Belgium. But the strategic plan of an attack upon France, thought out long before, and the conviction that this plan was perfect and that victory was sure to be swift and decisive – to say nothing of the prospect, alluring both from the economic and the military point of view, of seizing the mouth of the Scheldt – blinded the German politicians and made Germany venture upon a step which, by involving England in the war, was bound to confuse all her calculations and to destroy the hopes of a speedy success.

Under the first impression of England's entering the war on the side of France and Russia the German press showered reproaches against the English Government, accusing it of being partner to a treacherous conspiracy to destroy Germany. But, as a matter of fact, right up to the moment of the German troops invading Belgium, the Russian Government was anxious and uncertain about the intentions of the English Cabinet; in spite of all my entreaties I had not succeeded in persuading the English Government to declare their solidarity with Russia and France and thus open Germany's eyes to the terrible danger which the complacent arrogance of the Berlin

military party had brought upon her. There is hardly any need for me to add that if the alleged conspiracy between England and the Double Alliance had existed, there would have been no point in my asking the English Cabinet for such a declaration. The English are of an empirical turn of mind and refuse to believe in a national danger until it has become palpable to all and each. One can understand why English statesmen refrain as a rule from going in advance of public opinion and of anticipating the will of the people.

The war had not been prevented in time and now it had to be fought. Late in the evening of August 4, the German Chancellor had an interview with the British Ambassador in Berlin, during which the fatal words about 'the scrap of paper' were pronounced, associated henceforward with Bethmann-Hollweg's name.

It is hardly possible to find in the political history of Europe a carelessly uttered phrase which had done so much moral damage both to the man who had spoken it and to the régime which he represented.

In the morning of August 5 the news that England had declared war on Germany reached St. Petersburg and was received with equal satisfaction by the Government and the general public. The terrible feeling of apprehension with which we began the struggle brought about by the German connivance with the folly of Austria, was replaced by the hope that the war would end favourably. From the moment that German troops invaded Belgium I no longer doubted that England would enter the war on the side of the Double Alliance, and felt confident that the Allies would triumph over Germany's attempt to impose its hegemony upon Europe. Since we had not succeeded in persuading the English Cabinet to declare its solidarity with us, we could only rejoice that Germany had forced England into the ranks of her adversaries and thus achieved the end for which we had struggled in vain. It had proved impossible to avoid the European War, and now the essential thing was to fight it under the most favourable conditions; from that point of view nothing could be better than to wage the struggle not only by the land armies but also by the tremendous naval forces of Great Britain, which would paralyse the economic life of the enemy.

There remained, however, another and a very serious danger. Germany might deal a shattering blow to France and Russia during the very first weeks of the war by flinging her whole forces against one of them. The danger was particularly great for France, which was more vulnerable than Russia because of Paris being comparatively near the frontier. We had all heard of the Berlin General Staff's plan of concentrating the main forces of Germany against one of the enemies and, after crushing that one, flinging them against the other. All this had to be done within a very short time. I had, therefore, long been convinced that if Germany did not obtain a decisive victory within the first two or three months of war she would be defeated in the end.

The plan of the Berlin General Staff had not been put into execution, at any rate not as a whole. It does not seem to have been ascertained to this day by the Germans themselves who was responsible for not carrying it out, and it is difficult for foreigners to judge. I have seen in the press that some blame the Kaiser Wilhelm, others General von Moltke, the famous strategian's nephew, who did not inherit his uncle's talents; others think it was the fault of subordinate officials who had no definite opinion on matters of such importance but tried to please this or that person in power. One thing is certain – that in 1914 Germany began the war on both fronts and thus deprived herself, perhaps, of the chance of achieving rapid and decisive success on either.

Events soon confirmed my expectations. The victorious march of the German army on Paris was checked by the victory on the Marne which France owed to the Generals Joffre and Gallieni, and to the self-sacrificing assistance of Russia, which, at the request of the French Government, sent General Samsonov's Army, unprepared for taking the offensive, to face an almost certain destruction in East Prussia. The Marne victory saved the French capital and largely predetermined the issue of the war. The German Government had no illusions as to the meaning of their defeat on the Marne and took measures to prevent the general public from realizing its true significance and beginning to doubt at the very beginning of the war the possibility of a final victory. They easily achieved their purpose, and to this day not many

people in Germany see what the September battles on the Marne really meant.

From all that has so far been said, the conclusion may be drawn that the European War began both in the diplomatic and the military sense favourably for the Triple Entente. Nevertheless not only was Russia utterly unprepared for it, but even France, which had lived ever since 1870 under a perpetual menace of German invasion, proved to be inadequately equipped from the technical point of view, and had to employ incredible efforts to make up for lost time. England was in an even worse position, for, to say nothing of the imperfections of her technical equipment, she had to create an army capable of fighting on the Continent the best army in Europe, technically and numerically immeasurably superior to her own. To do so she had to reorganize her High Command, which left much to be desired, and to secure a supply of recruits. Both France and England had to grapple with problems of tremendous difficulty; nevertheless they soon succeeded in solving them and were able to send supplies to Russia, which stood in sore need of arms and munitions of war. In spite of this, however, the excellent morale of her army, which endured terrible losses with the spirit of heroic self-sacrifice, enabled Russia to continue the bitter struggle.

I will not go beyond my personal knowledge and speak in any detail of the military developments of the world war. This task has been partly fulfilled by the military writers of the Triple Entente, though so far as Russia is concerned it can only be fully dealt with when the necessary materials become accessible to military historians and it is once more possible to live and work under normal conditions. I will refer to military events only in so far as it is necessary for the explanation of happenings with which my memoirs are concerned.

After the first few months the war assumed a drawn-out character, because neither the Central Powers nor the Triple Entente – which became a Triple Alliance too late in the day – could obtain any decisive success. The Allied Governments were therefore faced in turn with political questions of first-rate importance which had to be settled by means of special agreements since they had importance for all the parties concerned.

The political interests attaching to many of these questions were extremely complicated and required most careful and impartial study. The work was so difficult that one could hardly have hoped to deal with it satisfactorily under conditions other than those in which the war placed the Great Powers. But the war opened a new era in human history.

Under the pressure of events which were bound radically to change the map of the old world it became both possible and necessary to settle the outstanding political problems which had remained unsolved for centuries. The Powers of the Triple Entente, welded together by the fear of the German danger, realized how essential it was to come to mutual understanding with regard to their conflicting interests in the various parts of the world.

Not one of the Entente Powers had aimed at depriving Germany of her status as a World Power, for this would have involved a risk and a responsibility which none ventured to incur. But, on the other hand, they thought it was a just and legitimate retribution for Germany that she should lose some of her power and influence as a World Power, for it was at her own peril that she attempted to rob the Entente Powers and endangered their very existence. There had been on that score no difference between them since the autumn of 1914. They were all agreed that the war must leave Germany powerless to do mischief. At the same time it was clear that even if Germany were defeated this would make but little difference to her position as a Great Power, situated as she is in the centre of Europe, richly endowed with natural resources, highly cultured and second only to Russia in the size of her population. That could not be helped. Germany was dangerous not as a European but as a World Power, pursuing objects incompatible with the political existence of the Great Powers which had entered upon the path of Imperialism several centuries earlier and no longer threatened the peace of Europe. At first Germany was content to compete with them in commerce and industry, driving her rivals out of the old markets and acquiring new ones, thanks to her energy and initiative and her financial and technical skill; so long as she did that she was merely an objectionable neighbour upon whom other European Powers looked askance, realizing that it was hard

for them to compete with her since they did not possess the means which she had created for her own purposes. Statesmen who watched the extraordinary growth of Germany's economic influence were aware that she would finally triumph not only in the European markets, but far beyond them, as was proved by her striking success in India and the Far East, in North and South America and Australia.

Such prospects troubled England more than any other Power of the Entente, since her interests suffered most from the triumphant progress of German commerce; they troubled Russia least, for her ambitions did not go beyond supplying her own markets and the nearest markets in Asia. France was in a peculiar position in this respect. The rapid growth of German industry and the corresponding development of her external trade were less dangerous to France than to her Allies, because the French export trade was for the most part limited to goods in which she had a kind of monopoly.

Europe was beginning to resign herself to the position of a German tributary. Had Germany appreciated the true significance of her economic victory in the present and still more in the future, had she been content with the enormous results achieved by the industry of her people and the organizing genius of her manufacturers and left things to follow their natural course, she would have been at the present moment the richest and the most powerful State in Europe. But the dream of a world-hegemony blinded her to the objects she might have achieved so easily. By threatening each of the Entente Powers, Germany brought them together not through sympathy for one another but through fear of a common danger to their very existence. From rivals resigned to some extent to the decrease in their economic importance they became Germany's enemies, knowing that there would be no saving grace for them once Germany attained her political ends.

In view of all this, the European conflict, which began by the Germans declaring war on Russia and invading Belgium, at once assumed the character of a life and death struggle. Each of the Entente Powers clearly saw what fate awaited her if Germany were victorious.

Russia would have lost the shores of the Baltic acquired by Peter the Great, opening a way for her into Western Europe

from the North and necessary for the defence of her capital; in the South she would have lost her Black Sea provinces, including the Crimea, which Germany intended to colonize. Should Germany and Austria-Hungary have established themselves on the Bosphorus and on the Balkans, Russia would have been cut off from the sea altogether and become once more of the same size as Muscovia in the seventeenth century. Poland would have been divided afresh and made into a vassal of Austria.

This was what lay before Russia. France's future would have been no better. At the time that Germany declared war upon Russia, the German Ambassador in Paris received orders to inform the French Government that if France remained neutral Germany would require of her, as a guarantee of her neutrality, the surrender of the fortresses Toul and Verdun, which would be returned to her after the war with Russia was ended.

Baron von Schoen could not give this message, as M. Viviani, who was then the Minister of Foreign Affairs, never gave him the chance, declaring that France 'would act in accordance with her own interests.' Nevertheless the German communication is a document unique of its kind: in remaining neutral, France was to lose for the duration of the war two of the chief points of defence on her Eastern frontier. What was she to expect if she took part in the war and if Germany were victorious? Probably she would have lost a good third of her territory and most of her colonies and become a mere second-rate Power.

Great Britain was not threatened with the seizure of her territory in Europe, but the German occupation of Belgium, if only for a time – to say nothing of its complete annexation, which was seriously considered by Germany [1] – created a position which the English people could not have tolerated.

The Entente Powers engaged in the war with Germany fully realized what fateful issues were at stake. Victory meant to them the preservation of their independence and the possi-

[1] In conversation with the Belgian Minister, Baron Beyens, Herr von Jagow expressed the opinion that in the midst of changes happening in Europe small States would not be able to preserve their independence. (Second Grey Book, No. 2.)

bility of free development. For Germany the case was different. Although her politicians and journalists talked a great deal about 'the life and death struggle,' they knew very well that the real issue simply was whether Germany would be able to realize her dream of world power. It cannot be denied, of course, that it was a tremendous gamble. A whole generation of Germans had been brought up in the hope of winning it, and all the efforts and sacrifices, made both by the Government and by individual men consciously working for the greatness of their Fatherland, had been directed to that purpose. Failure meant a terrible blow to the national pride and a serious menace to the governmental régime which had wedded its destinies to a grandiose scheme of world power. At the same time, however, sober-minded Germans – few as they were during the stormy period of the war – realized that whether their dreams were fulfilled or not, Germany would not cease to exist; the many millions of her people would not lose their inherent qualities which had created their country's greatness, so that Germany could not be really weakened, and at the worst would merely be deprived of some of her territory. In ceasing to be a World Power, Germany would still remain a great European Power.

So much was clear to all responsible statesmen of the Triple Entente and to every man capable of political thought. The risks involved were not equal for the opposed parties. For Germany defeat would merely shatter an ambitious dream, while to her opponents it meant either complete destruction or such loss of honour and material power as would be little better than destruction.

This may, perhaps, explain the light-hearted way in which the German Government plunged its country into a world war, choosing the least favourable moment for carrying out its plans. It follows from what has been said that Germany was infinitely less vulnerable than the Entente Powers. The only way to weaken her permanently was to deprive her of the auxiliary forces she possessed in South-eastern Europe by destroying the artificial system of alliances created by Bismarck and developed by his successors. The chief of these auxiliary forces was Austria-Hungary and next in importance were Turkey and Bulgaria.

I have already said that under the weak rule of Wilhelm II and Bethmann-Hollweg, the relations between Austria and Germany changed to the disadvantage of the latter. In forming alliance with Austria in 1879 Bismarck intended to assign to her a subordinate position and make use of her in case of a war with Russia, which had become probable from the time of the Berlin Congress, when Germany, waiving her age-long friendship with us, sacrificed our interests in the Balkans to the interests of England and Austria. This change of front on her part was the beginning of a new system of alliances which, by the end of the nineteenth century, divided Europe into two hostile camps and indirectly led to the catastrophe of 1914. As early as 1909 the relations between Germany and Austria showed signs of changing, and Austria gradually assumed a part out of keeping with her real significance. By the summer of 1914 things had gone so far that Austria was the leading ally and directed the policy of the German Government towards her own ends.

I am dwelling upon this fact again in order to show that Austria, in herself not dangerous to anyone, acquired, in virtue of the close tie that Bismarck established between her and Germany, a tremendous importance both for Russia, openly provoked by her, and for the other Great Powers, since the peace of Europe was in her hands. Her military power was small because of her lack of national unity, but her geographical position made her of unique value to Germany as an ally. Protecting the southern frontier of Germany, the Dual Monarchy lay midway between Western Europe, the Balkans, and the Near East where Germany was being driven by her 'new policy.' Nature itself seemed to have destined the Hapsburg Empire to subserve the ends of Germany from the time that Austria's inner weakness rendered her incapable of achieving her own ends by herself.

Austria increased the power of her ally as a nought increases the power of a number after which it stands. The surest way to deal a serious blow to Germany and to safeguard the Entente from the danger of her dominating the world was to destroy the tottering structure of the Hapsburg Monarchy, which even in its decline remained the hotbed of European unrest.

After the Balkan Wars Turkey ceased to be a great or even a European Power. She retained but a small portion of her territory this side of the Straits, but still remained their keeper and therefore preserved her international importance. As I have pointed out, from the beginning of the twentieth century Turkey fell more and more under the influence of Germany. In the autumn of 1913 her dependence became so complete and obvious that it evoked a legitimate protest from Russia, who was more concerned in preserving Turkish independence than any other Power; our friends in Western Europe also expressed some anxiety. In 1914 Turkey's attitude to the war was a matter of first-rate importance to all the belligerent countries. The possibility of Turkey siding with the Central Powers was particularly dangerous to Russia, for in that case the Black Sea would be open to the enemy's fleet, and a considerable part of our army needed on the Western front would have to be retained on the Turkish frontier, and, the Black Sea being closed, we should be cut off from direct communication with our Allies and be paralysed economically, having nothing but the distant and in every way inconvenient port of Archangel for an outlet.

Germany had naturally considered all these points, and her Ambassador in Turkey, Baron von Wangenheim, a typical representative of the German militarist diplomacy, spared no efforts to draw Turkey into the war from the very first. The American Ambassador in Turkey, Mr. Morgenthau, who carefully watched Wangenheim's proceedings, affirms that from the very beginning of the war between Germany and Russia, he decided to utilize the presence in the Mediterranean of two German cruisers, the *Goeben* and the *Breslau*; making them go to Constantinople through the Dardanelles, he confronted Europe with the accomplished fact of Turko-German alliance, and thus avoided all preliminary diplomatic negotiations. Through an oversight of the commanders of our Allies' fleet the manœuvre was successful: on August 10 both the German cruisers were in perfect safety in Turkish waters and Turkey irrevocably cast in her lot with our enemies.

This event resulted for Russia in the fateful consequences that have just been referred to and considerably prolonged the war. Again, as in 1911, we were bottled up in the Black Sea;

our shore from the mouth of the Danube to Asia Minor was open to bombardment by the German ships, which were far better armed and swifter than ours.

Turkey was largely dependent upon Germany and had an unreasoning faith in her being invincible; nevertheless, I doubted that she would venture to cast in her lot with Germany from the first without waiting to see which way the luck of war was likely to turn. It would have been perfectly natural to exercise caution in a matter that was of vital importance to her very existence. And since Germany had achieved no rapid and decisive victories upon which her whole plan of a European campaign was based, and the war was obviously going to be a long one, Turkey would very probably have refrained from taking part in it and thus would have considerably helped it to end sooner in favour of Russia. All this had no doubt been taken into consideration in Berlin and the quickness and resource with which Wangenheim carried out his task did a great service to Germany. He was certainly the most successful of the German fighting diplomatists.

On the other hand, in countries which were connected with Austria by treaty, Germany had had no success whatever, although her diplomatists had tried for years to make them subserve the political ends of Germany. This failure was due to Austria, which showed a complete disregard of the legitimate rights of Italy and Rumania and refused to make any concessions to them at the very time when she needed their assistance most. The German Government, having once renounced its lawful claim to be the leading partner in its alliance with Austria, proved powerless to overcome her obstinacy and to remedy her blunders. In view of this the Italian and Rumanian Governments had a perfect right, according to the letter of their treaties, to go back on their undertakings and to remain neutral in spite of all the efforts of the German diplomatists in Rome and their lavish promises to Bucharest.

Italy and Rumania were influenced in their decision by the fact that Great Britain had joined the Franco-Russian alliance; her naval resources made the Entente invincible in a drawn-out war. It must also be remembered that Italy's German sympathies at the time of Crispi's Government had led to considerable disappointment on her part, having

brought her no colonial or other advantages and involved her in a grave economic crisis. By way of reaction she gladly responded to the friendly advance of M. Delcassé and, later on, of the Russian Government. In Rumania the position was more or less similar. As I have said before, the Government and the public opinion of Bucharest were convinced that Russia was right in maintaining that Rumania could not become a united nation without the help of the Russian Government. Therefore, by the time that Germany and Austria declared war upon us no one in Bucharest, except King Charles and a few neo-conservative followers of Karp and Marghiloman, thought that Rumania was bound by treaty to support Austria, and accordingly it remained neutral in spite of Germany's promise to reward Rumania at Russian expense by giving her Bessarabia. At that period, and for some time following, the Rumanians understood how dangerous such a present was and were not tempted by it. Nearly three years of Bolshevik regime in Russia were required to make it possible rudely to tear away from her the Moldavian territory which had become an integral part of the Russian State.

The break-up of the Triple Alliance and Rumania's falling away from it were favourable to the Entente Powers. In those circumstances it was impossible for Germany and Austria to carry on the war without finding fresh allies in the Balkans. Turkey was easily and quickly caught in the German net, but this success could only acquire its full value if it were rapidly followed by a similar success in Bulgaria so that Serbia might be crushed altogether. This second task proved to be somewhat more difficult and took longer, but owing to Ferdinand of Coburg's help it was also carried out successfully. Obedient to its German ruler and his Government, selected to serve the needs of Germany, the Bulgarian people, freed by Russia, joined the ranks of their liberator's enemies.

The European War provided Ferdinand with the opportunity, as he thought, of re-establishing his position shaken by the disastrous results of his policy in 1913 and of avenging himself on Serbia for his defeat. Even more than Serbia he hated Russia, which he regarded as chiefly responsible for the Bucharest peace unfavourable to Bulgaria and the failure of his Byzantine dream. By furthering the cause of Germany in

the Balkans he hoped to resuscitate in his person the Constantinople *βασιλεύς* or at any rate to find an occasion for displaying the Byzantian stage outfit he had prepared beforehand.[1] Those who knew King Ferdinand will probably not dispute this suggestion.

Every one remembers the universal indignation that prevailed in Russia at the news of Ferdinand's fresh treachery – the second since 1913. In the middle of October, 1915, in accordance with an Austro-German plan, Bulgarian troops attacked Serbia while the Germans occupied Semendria and Belgrade. This was the beginning of the Serbian tragedy – the famous retreat of the Serbian army towards the Adriatic. It went along impassable tracks in the mountains followed by most of the civilian population that fled before the horrors of the Bulgarian invasion. People and horses perished in thousands of cold and hunger. From the time of the Beresina catastrophe no army had been through so terrible a time. A portion of the Serbian army lived, nevertheless, to see the happy day of the national restoration and to take a glorious part in the victory over the enemies who had brought Serbia to the brink of destruction. Fortunately for her she had to do with external enemies only and has not experienced the worst of all evils – treason among her own people.

Thus Germany compensated herself for the loss of Italy and Rumania by acquiring new allies and thereby cutting off Russia from her Western neighbours. Now that the Straits were closed and Bulgaria sided with our enemies, we could only communicate with Western Europe through the distant North or through the still more distant Far East. This made it extremely difficult for us to obtain promptly and regularly munitions of war, of which we early began to feel the shortage. We possessed hardly any heavy guns except in the fortresses and in the fleet, and, by the summer of 1915, had only one-third of the necessary quantity of rifles and cartridges. Field artillery was excellent and had an admirable personnel, but it could do little because of the lack of munitions. There was no hope to make up the shortage with our own resources, for our

[1] King Ferdinand kept by him the regalia and the full dress of the Emperor of Byzantium which he had bought from some theatrical company.

military factories were not sufficiently equipped and our technique was behindhand in many ways.

I mention this fact in order to bring out the fatal significance of Turkey and Bulgaria being dragged into the war against us; in consequence we were completely isolated. It may confidently be said that this circumstance had a decisive influence on the subsequent course of the war and even of the political events in Russia, so unfavourable to the issue of the struggle. The strain on the warring nations was so great that not one of the Powers taking part in the dreadful conflict would have been able honourably to acquit itself had it to draw upon its own resources alone. The Germans had created a technically perfect system of their own, definitely constructed for the needs of a European war and were, therefore, in an exceptional position; but our Allies, whose technical achievements were infinitely superior to our own, proved to be behind the times and had to make up the defects in their armaments in order to carry on the struggle successfully. They could do so because there had from the first been co-operation between them, both in regard to military matters and in the domain of finance and economics. Realizing the necessity for concerted action, they created a single front and unity of command, subordinating their joint forces to General Foch as the most gifted of the allied military leaders. There is no need to say that our enemies, too, strictly adhered to the same principle. The plan of campaign was worked out in Berlin, directions as to the military operations of each of the allies were issued from there, and German detachments were transferred from one front to another in order to give help where it was needed most. In return Germany's allies supplied her with the foodstuffs and the raw materials she required. This, however, did not cover the enormous needs of her population, and imports from the neutral countries, rendered difficult by the watchfulness of the English fleet, became more and more necessary.

It can be easily imagined what would have happened to any one of our Allies if they had been from the very first months of the war cut off from direct and rapid communication with the countries closely connected with them by the destinies of war. Such isolation would have had results very similar to

those that were observable in Russia and caused growing anxiety to the Government and the public as our solitary position made itself felt more and more. Anxiety for the issue of war easily develops into a feeling of general discontent and destroys that prestige of the Government without which no political organization worthy of being called a State can exist. And when these accidental causes combine with deeper and more permanent ones, as was the case in Russia, the process of destruction proceeds at a faster rate. I am profoundly convinced that the downfall of the Russian Empire could only have happened because from the very beginning of the war Russia found herself in incomparably worse conditions than her allies. Could she have fought shoulder to shoulder with them, she would undoubtedly have successfully carried out the tremendous task that had fallen to her lot. But she was deprived of the chief factor which had ensured victory to her allies – of the possibility, namely, of closely co-operating with them and being able to share their material resources. The triumph of the Russian Revolution was, in the first place, due to national disappointment which ended in despair. Other causes contributed to it, but by themselves they would not have been sufficient to bring about the mad and criminal result of destroying the Russian State, which was essentially healthy and full of vitality and needed merely rational reforms to bring it into conformity with the spirit of the times.

This was the conviction that lay at the basis of Stolypin's reforms, and he began gradually freeing the peasants from the bondage of the communal ownership of land. This important reform placed the Russian State upon a secure and sound foundation. The revolutionists, crushed by Stolypin in 1906, saw the fatal danger which threatened their cause and by the hand of Bogrov dealt a deadly blow to this noble son of Russia. It is often said that no one is irreplaceable. But there was no one to replace Stolypin and the revolution triumphed amidst the moral and material trials brought about by the war. As I am writing these lines there rises before me the great figure of Stolypin, full of power and simplicity, and I recall the words that I had so often heard from him: 'For the success of the Russian Revolution war is essential, without war the revolutionists can do nothing.' In 1914 we had the war,

and after three years of bitter struggle, which we had to wage in isolation, cut off from our Allies, the revolution, in the person of Lenin and his confederates, came to us from Germany. They devoted themselves to serving our enemies and were joyfully welcomed by them as allies.

When Ferdinand's and Radoslavov's treachery became generally known, the Governments of the Entente countries were bitterly reproached for having failed to prevent it. Naturally the reproaches were most bitter in Russia. The consequences of the Bulgarian betrayal were more serious for us than for anyone, and the baseness of it was acutely felt by the Russian public. The reproaches were mainly directed against the Russian diplomacy and against me as its chief representative. Not only the Nationalist Press, headed by the *Novoe Vremya*, but even the circles which generally took up a calm and disinterested attitude towards foreign politics, blamed my department for having failed to keep watch on Bulgaria – so important a factor in the war that had developed over a Balkan question. Even in the Duma, where my foreign policy was often supported and favourably commented upon, reproaches were levied at me. I was all the more sensitive to them that at the time I was not in a position fully to reveal the innumerable difficulties which prevented the Entente Powers from retaining Ferdinand of Coburg on their side. The chief of these difficulties was that our Allies had no concerted plan of action with regard to the Near East and were not agreed about sending troops there, which was the only thing that could have prevented the Bulgarian attack on Serbia. A strong military detachment appearing at the right moment in Salonika and the Vardar Valley would probably have stopped Bulgaria from entering the war and have saved thousands of lives, even if it were no bigger than the contingent sent by the Allies to the Dardanelles to carry out the almost hopeless task of taking Constantinople from the land without having a sufficient base for unfolding their forces.

The Gallipoli expedition failed to achieve its object, but it drew a part of the Turkish forces away from our frontier, thus contributing to our successes in Asia Minor, which eventually secured for us the whole of its North-eastern district. I do not

feel competent to say which of our Allies were to blame for the Gallipoli disaster which made the war last so much longer. In France they accused Delcassé, who, it was said, was opposed to weakening the French forces on the Western front by sending any of them to the Balkans. In England many people blamed Mr. Winston Churchill, while his supporters put the responsibility on Lord Kitchener, who perished later at sea on his way to Russia to work out a concerted plan of military operations against Germany. The most probable answer is that the weakness of our Allies' Eastern policy was not the fault of any one individual but was due to the lack of concerted action. They did not attain complete unity until the end of the war, when it gave them the victory.

The failure of the Gallipoli expedition was a great misfortune for Russia. We could not rectify the consequences of it, since it was impossible for us to transfer to the Balkans our troops from Asia Minor, where they were advancing against the Turkish troops. Our transport was utterly inadequate for such a task, and, besides, the Headquarters insisted on sending to the Western front all the troops not urgently necessary for retaining our acquisitions in Asia Minor and gaining further ground from the Turks.

I received letter after letter from our Minister in Bulgaria, Savinsky, begging for military contingents to be sent with all speed to Varna and Burgas, the occupation of which was, in his opinion, the only means to prevent King Ferdinand's treason.

There was something to be said for this, but it was a question to be decided by the Army chiefs and not by me, and they were not in sympathy with Savinsky's view. In a letter General Alexeiev sent me in October, 1915, he said it was impossible to bring Russian troops up the Danube; a landing in Burgas or Varna could, in his opinion, only have been made if we had Constanza for our military base. All the ships in Odessa and Sevastopol could hold no more than twenty thousand men; thus the detachments landed first would, so the General thought, be exposed to serious danger until the rest of the troops were landed. In view of this Russia was powerless to help Serbia directly, but she could actively support her by resuming the offensive in Galicia. Our high command adopted

this decision and Bulgaria remained outside our sphere of intervention.

A propos of General Alexeiev's reference to Constanza as a military base for the Russian troops in Bulgaria, I should like to say a few words about the attitude of the Rumanian Government, in the autumn of 1915, to the question of actively joining the Entente. When we were considering the ways of dispatching our troops to the help of Serbia we naturally thought that the best and simplest method of influencing Bulgaria would be to send an armed force there across the Rumanian territory. M. Bratiano, however, immediately declared that this would not be allowed, and so the plan had to be abandoned. Disappointing as M. Bratiano's declaration was, it was not a matter for surprise. At that time Rumania was still weaker and less prepared for war than a year later, when, under the pressure of our Allies, she made a belated entrance into the war so as not to lose the chance of realizing some day her national programme.

Unable to take any efficient steps for preventing the King of Bulgaria from carrying out his design, the Russian Government had to be content with measures of a moral character, such as the Tsar's manifesto pouring scorn on the Bulgarian treachery and declaring the painful necessity for Russia to unsheath her sword against a Slav country whose freedom had been ransomed at the cost of Russian blood. At the insistence of our Allies, Russian ships bombarded Varna. It was an utterly useless measure and I had the strongest objection to it. It seemed to me an unjustifiable piece of barbarism to bombard undefended towns, as was commonly done during the European War when all restrictions on the unavoidable cruelties connected with warfare were removed and new, unheard-of horrors were introduced. It was also highly repellent to me because in past times Russia had more than once taken the initiative in working out international rules for mitigating the horrors of war, and the sufferings it causes to the civilian population. Unfortunately it was not the business of diplomacy to criticize the measures which the military leaders said they were compelled to adopt by way of reprisals and, indirectly, as a means of shortening the war, and any attempt at interference with them was doomed to failure.

As I have said already, our Allies proved no less powerless to prevent the Bulgarians from attacking Serbia and joining the Austro-German troops in the West than we were in the East. Thus no efficient obstacles had been raised to an event which had disastrous consequences for Germany's opponents, especially for Russia, cutting her off almost completely from her Western Allies, whose technical assistance became necessary to her some six months after the beginning of the war. This circumstance was not a surprise to persons who, like myself, were intimately connected with the Government. We knew that to prepare Russia for war we needed another three or four years of intense activity and of such reforms in the Army as the responsible officials at the War Office were hardly capable to carry out.[1] Among the general public, and even in the Army, very few people were aware of the true state of things, and when it did become generally known it gave rise to the dangerous mood which was utilized by our external and internal enemies in order to undermine the discipline in the Army ranks. Both the upper classes and the people began to doubt the possibility of victory. These doubts were accompanied by the feeling that the sacrifices and privations which

[1] There was not the slightest doubt that we were not ready for war, and yet the German Nationalists, whose work of propaganda had been recently promoted to the rank of a special branch of learning with professorial chairs of its own, spread throughout Germany and beyond its boundaries the legend about the military designs of M. Poincaré and of the Russian military party, headed by Grand Duke Nicholas. Some of the Nationalist papers described me as a blind tool of that party. Sufficient mention has been made already of the peaceable disposition of the French Government and of M. Poincaré in particular. As to the aggressive militarist party of Grand Duke Nicholas, I am in conscience bound to declare that in 1914 there was no militarist party in Russia. During the Balkan Wars there had been a certain amount of militarist agitation in Court and Military circles in St. Petersburg, but its complete failure made an end of all dreams of aggression and there was no trace of them left at the time of the Austro-Serbian crisis. As to the attempt to describe me as the tool of the military party, it hardly deserves to be considered. Every one who was in the least acquainted with the situation in the Russian Government circles could have told the authors of this fable that my relations to the Chauvinists of 1913 precluded all possibility of my co-operating with them. This was well known to many people in St. Petersburg, beginning with the members of the diplomatic corps, in which there were two German representatives.

the war with a well-prepared and excellently equipped enemy imposed upon the population were useless. The German propaganda and the destructive work of our revolutionary parties, generously financed from Berlin,[1] fell upon a favourable soil. The home policy of the Government took no account of the legitimate desires of the people, frustrating them at every turn, and was bound sooner or later to wreck the mechanism of the State. The Emperor Nicholas II was absorbed in his duties of Commander-in-Chief, the post which he accepted with the best intentions but in an evil hour for Russia. He lived at the Army Headquarters and only occasionally came to the capital, the atmosphere of which he evidently found oppressive. Owing to the prolonged absence of the Emperor, the power passed into the hands of ignorant and unworthy people who grouped themselves round the Empress and were headed by the notorious Rasputin. This circumstance was obviously of advantage to the enemies of Russia. It would be naïve to suppose that Germany, who invented the theory that it was legitimate to harm the enemy by all possible means, should refrain from making use of it.

I have already said that the moment chosen by the Central Powers for war with the Triple Entente was badly chosen and that the German and Austrian diplomatists had failed to prepare the ground properly. In the absence of rapid and decisive victories on both fronts, the Central Powers could have but small hope of success. The clever manœuvre of the German Ambassador in Constantinople drawing Turkey into war with us from the very first and then the treachery of Ferdinand of Bulgaria considerably improved their position. Nevertheless, the general trend of events proves clearly enough that the main chance of success lay for Germany in uniting her efforts with the forces of the Russian Revolution, which disintegrated our Army. The success of this policy on the part of Germany postponed her defeat by another six months. The blindness of the Russian governing circles into which, during the Tsar's absence, many bad elements had crept, ensured the success of the conspiracy against the honour and wholeness

[1] The German Socialist Bernstein asserts that the German Government gave seventy million marks for the needs of the Russian Revolution; his statement has not been contradicted.

of Russia and soon brought the country to the verge of ruin.

This exposure of the difficulties of our military position in 1915 may serve to some extent as an answer to the question how the plan of the Bulgarian king and his confederates could have succeeded. Unable to take efficient steps against them, the Russian Government was forced to have recourse to moral measures which were essentially useless and could not prevent the disaster. Bulgaria received admonition from us and promises of help and future political and territorial advantages from Germany as a reward for her treachery. This was more than enough to put an end to Ferdinand's hesitations and to induce him to throw in his country's lot with the nation which, in his opinion, was sure to be victorious.

CHAPTER X

I HAVE had occasion to mention the enormous significance of the question of the Straits for Russia. Russian statesmen, and indeed all educated Russians, had long been convinced that the future of Russia depended upon the solution of that problem.

After the Russian wars of liberation in the nineteenth century and the victory of the Balkan Allies in 1912 over the Ottoman Empire, the presence of Turkey among the Great Powers of Europe became a political paradox due to the Powers' rivalry over the Bosphorus and their fear of Russia having the Straits. Later on there appeared another reason for preserving Turkey – namely, Germany's attempt to carry out her world-policy. The political and economical rivalry of the Powers receded into the background in view of the obvious intention of the German Cabinet firmly to establish its influence in Constantinople before going on to secure other points of vantage on the way to the richest districts of Asiatic Turkey. In this manner it was proposed to create something like a new Khalifate with Wilhelm II at the head; he had already proclaimed himself the defender of Islam. It is obvious that in pursuing such a plan Germany was bound to overlook the claims of other nations, which had a historical and economic interest in the Straits at a time when the Near East had no significance for the Germans. Germany was determined to make for herself 'a place in the sun,' as her statesmen put it; in doing so she was ready to overthrow all obstacles in her way, and could not be troubled to consider her rivals' claims to the different portions of the Turkish legacy, although historically their interests might be more closely connected with the Near East than her own, which were of an artificial character and of a more recent origin.

A year before the war we could have no doubts about the true aims of German policy in the East. The systematic tendency to strengthen Austrian influence in the Balkans at the expense of Russian (Wilhelm II confessed this to have been the case [1]) – the gradual subjection of the Turkish Government to the guidance of the German Cabinet, and, finally,

[1] Kautsky's *Diplomatic Documents*, Vol. I, p. 108.

a German General taking command of the Constantinople garrison, made the Russian Government watch with redoubled care the developments on the shores of the Bosphorus. It was natural that our diplomatists and military officials should discuss what precautionary measures Russia could take in case of danger to vindicate her legitimate interests against German aggression. I have already mentioned the deliberations that took place in February, 1914, in connection with the provocative character of General Liman von Sanders' mission. I emphatically repeat once more that the Committee which did nothing but establish the fact that our Black Sea forces were not ready for war, was called solely with the idea of defending the vital interests of Russia and had no aggressive purposes whatever. The German Press, hostile to us and anxious to prove that Russia and France were responsible for the war, still maintains – with an obstinacy that may well seem suspicious to the most impartial reader – that M. Poincaré on the one hand, and M. Isvolsky and the St. Petersburg military circles obediently followed by the Russian diplomacy on the other, did their best to destroy the peace of Europe in order that France might regain Alsace-Lorraine and Russia realize her national dream and acquire Constantinople and the Straits.

I would not think of denying that the French had never abandoned the hope of regaining their lost provinces, and that the possession of the Straits has been, and will be, the cherished hope of every Russian. But neither we nor our Allies in our efforts to realize our national aims had ever lost sight of realities and we certainly never thought of attaining them at the expense of a world-catastrophe. Neither France nor Russia was for a moment oblivious of the tremendous risks involved in what the Germans call 'a preventive war' (*Preventivkrieg*) against which Bismarck had more than once warned them. The risk infinitely outweighed the possible advantages, especially in the conditions created in the twentieth century in Europe by the system of political alliances. In flinging their accusations against us the German Nationalists forget that the military organization both of Russia and of France, after 1870, was based upon the principles of self-defence, and that therefore neither country was fit to conduct on their German

frontiers an offensive on a large scale.[1] The military plans of the Berlin General Staff were built on a diametrically opposite principle, involving a lightning attack against their Eastern and Western neighbours, both of whom were to be crushed with the utmost possible rapidity. Such a system had become part and parcel of the military Germans' mentality and had been tried in several campaigns, so that there was no question of Germany fighting any war other than a war of aggression. The spirit of that system affected the course of the German diplomatic negotiations with Russia and France. There was no question of any negotiations whatever with Belgium and Luxembourg. The first message received in Brussels from Berlin had the form of an ultimatum and was followed by the invasion of Belgium by the German troops.

In the case of Russia the diplomatic procedure at the early stages was of a less stormy character, but it soon passed from the hands of Bethmann-Hollweg and von Jagow into those of the General Staff, the Chancellor and the Foreign Secretary adopting towards the military authorities a purely Tolstoyan attitude of non-resistance to evil. After that the negotiations assumed a more rapid course, and on July 29 reached the stage of ultimatums which caused Russia to hurry with her precautionary military measures, and led to a simultaneous mobilization both in Russia and Germany and then to the declaration of war by the German Ambassador.

The part played by the chief of the German General Staff, General von Moltke, in hastening the final catastrophe, is clearly brought out in the memoirs of the Chief of the Austrian General Staff, General Conrad von Hoetzendorff, the veracity of whose testimony cannot be called in question by the Germans.

The German official publications show in their true light the mood and the behaviour of the German Government circles, and one cannot help wondering to what purpose the German Nationalists persist in assertions, the falsity of which

[1] The offensive in East Prussia, undertaken by us at a critical moment at the French request, was a brilliant improvisation and did not form part of the plans of our General Staff; and although it achieved its purpose and made the French victory on the Marne possible, it ended in a serious defeat for us.

had long been obvious to every unprejudiced observer. It is more than doubtful whether this extraordinary obstinacy can serve any useful end. It seems to me that it defeats the very purpose it is supposed to serve. Sober voices are more and more often heard in the German Press trying to moderate the patriotic fervour of the Nationalists who see a beam in their enemies' eye and not a mote in their own. Some day Germany will have to return to peaceful relations with her neighbours, since this is equally necessary to her and them. It is unwise to irritate one's wounds and thus keep them festering; if time is allowed to do its beneficial task it will heal the worst sores. I say this à propos of the passionate propaganda of the German Nationalists, but the same thing applies to other European countries, including Russia, which has drained the cup of suffering to the very bottom. We must not let present sorrow and evil blind us to a brighter future which is always possible.

Returning to the question of the Straits, I repeat once more that though the criminal thought of starting a European war in order to gain them had never occurred to us, Russian diplomacy could not fail to concentrate its attention upon it once the war had been begun by somebody else. We knew that this fundamental and age-long problem of the Russian foreign policy could only be settled in connection with a European war, and that its fundamental solution could alone reconcile the Russian people to the terrible sacrifices demanded by the war.

Soon after the declaration of war I strongly felt the pressure of public opinion urging that the international position which had arisen against our will should be utilized to satisfy Russia's acute need of safeguarding her economic freedom and political safety. The issue before us was perfectly clear: we had either to gain possession of the Straits during the war or doom the Russian people to many years of economic weakness and possible external danger. In 1914 there was no difference of opinion in Russia as to which of these alternatives was preferable; differences appeared only three years later, as a result of the demoralization due to war-weariness and the revolutionary propaganda that blunted the good sense and the patriotic feeling of the people and of its self-appointed leaders. The formula imported from abroad, 'peace without annexations and contributions' gained ground among the

people, and in adopting it the revolutionary Government betrayed the policy bequeathed to Russia through centuries, committing an act of apostasy of which hardly a parallel can be found in the annals of history.

But in 1914 the Russian people were still conscious of themselves as a nation, and this consciousness strongly made itself felt in the sphere of foreign policy. The necessity of settling the question of the Straits became more urgent than it had ever been in the times of Catherine or Nicholas I, when it was purely theoretical and did not interest the Russian public as a whole; and, indeed, neither in the eighteenth nor in the nineteenth century had the public opinion in Russia been represented by a special organ like the Duma. I have already said that I have always been attentive to the opinion of its members, whom at that time I could still regard, in the words of the Tsar, as 'the best of the Russian people.' The revolutionary agitation which accompanied the creation of the Duma and laid its stamp upon the first two Dumas had been lived down and the new representatives of the country were as yet uncontaminated by the bitterness against the Government which its fatal mistakes in the two years preceding the revolution of 1917 finally engendered. The third and fourth Dumas were assemblies which no Minister had a right to disregard. And though in the last one some dangerous tendencies were manifested, the Government might easily have checked them, had it abandoned the perilous course of distrusting the representatives of the nation and systematically refusing to take into consideration the Duma's legitimate request for entrusting governmental power to men worthy of confidence and respect.

Faithfully reflecting the mood of all thinking people in Russia, the Duma, with the exception of a few extreme elements who were chiefly non-Russian, showed a keen interest in the question of the Straits from the moment that Turkey joined the ranks of our enemies; every time that I met members of the Duma they questioned me about the Government's intentions in the matter and warmly begged me not to miss the favourable opportunity of settling once for all the troublesome problem of the Near East which had for centuries hindered the normal development of the national life.

I entirely sympathized with their attitude. I had realized

long before that the historical development of the Russian State could only reach its final stage when we obtained the control of the Bosphorus and the Dardanelles, which are the gates created by Nature herself, for letting out the national resources of Russia needed by Western Europe and for admitting into Russia the products of Western industry essential to her. Every delay in this interchange produces a dangerous disturbance in the economic life of Russia, similar to the stoppage of circulation in the human body. The task of watching and regulating it cannot be left to the will of Russia's neighbours, who might be hostile to her or act under the influence of her enemies. And it was through these gates, too, that enemy forces had invaded Russia, bringing war and destruction into her territory. Our only good port, Sevastopol, is too far from the Bosphorus to be a sufficient protection from this danger. Every one who knows Russian history and considers impartially the conditions necessary to the growth and development of our people, the most numerous in Europe, must see that it cannot for ever remain in an incomparably less favourable position than other peoples of Europe who have not been called to play the great historical part that Russia has played since the accession of the Romanovs to the throne. She has built up a great Empire, carried out the great cultural task of liberating the Balkan peoples and enabling them to have a free political life of their own, and introduced order and civilization into the boundless spaces of Northern and Central Asia. The destruction wrought by the fruitless folly of the revolution has temporarily checked the development of Russia, but there is no doubt that she will rise up again. She will engage in new and productive activities as soon as she has shaken off the yoke of Communism fastened upon her people by a group of fanatics who have taken advantage of the moral lassitude due to the strain of the war and to the general conditions of national life. The Russian people will recover from the terrible hardships – incredible, one would have thought, in the twentieth century – just as they had recovered from their earlier diseases of growth – the Mongolian invasion and the 'Time of Trouble.'[1] Growing

[1] Which lasted from the end of the sixteenth century to 1613, i.e. from the death of the last Tsar of the House of Rurik to the election of Michael Romanov.

all the stronger for their experience, they will no longer be beguiled by political Utopias which held them under their spell for over a century.

In the question of the Straits I was at one with the public opinion of the country, though I differed from it on the fatal subject of Constantinople, which the Russian people had named Tsargrad, surrounding it with a romantic halo. It did not seem to me that there was any vital connection between Constantinople and the Straits, and I was of opinion that our laying claim to that town made it much more difficult to settle the question of the Straits in our favour. As a member of the Orthodox Church I naturally regarded the cradle of our faith with gratitude and reverence, but politically Constantinople seemed to me merely an unwelcome hindrance. There is no racial bond between Moscow and Tsargrad, and the spiritual one has been reduced solely to the intangible unity of dogma since the historical destinies of the Russian and of the Greek Church have been widely divergent. Valuable as I believed our relations to the Œcumenical Patriarchate to be, they could not make me forget the political differences between ourselves and the Greeks with regard to the problems of the Near East.

The great past of Byzantium and the historical splendour of Constantinople had created for it a glamour which could not be destroyed even by its becoming the capital of the Osman Khalifs, who built up on the blood and bones of the Eastern Christians the State against which Russia had to struggle for two centuries. Constantinople did not lose its political significance as the capital of the Sultans; indeed, its importance increased, for it became the centre of communication between the West and the Mahometan countries when regular trade relations were established between them. This, to a great extent, explains why our Western neighbours took such a jealous interest in Constantinople, each seeking to include it politically and economically in its sphere of influence to the detriment of the others and of Russia, which, owing to its geographical situation, was particularly concerned in the destinies of the Black Sea and the Straits. For a long time our chief rivals were the English and the French, but at the beginning of the twentieth century we were faced with a new and

still more dangerous opponent – Germany, bent on a colonial policy and on economic conquest.

The attack upon us in 1914 by the Central Powers and by Turkey made it imperative for Russia to abandon the part of an attentive spectator and to make the question of the Straits, or, in other words, of our safety in the Black Sea, a part of her immediate practical programme. The sudden bombardment of our coast towns by the German warships under the Turkish flag proved to us how dangerous the position of our Southern frontier was. I came to the conclusion that it was essential to begin negotiations with our Allies concerning our rights to the ownership of the Straits as the only way to secure our safety. In following this course I followed the example of our friends and allies in other parts of the world who had not waited for the enemy to invade their territory. Had I acted otherwise I would have failed in my duty to my country and deserved its reproach.

I knew that many difficulties awaited me in my negotiations with the British and the French Ambassadors.

In spite of our twenty years' alliance with France, we could never quite agree about our policy in the Near East. The French Government was safeguarding the interests of their subjects who had invested considerable capital in the various financial concerns both in Constantinople and in Asia Minor; in addition to these real interests it had to watch over some that dated from the distant times when France was a monarchy. The French Embassy patronized a number of Roman Catholic religious institutions, quite independently of the policy which the French Government might adopt at home towards the Roman Church. Its aim in safeguarding their interests was to preserve in the East the prestige of the French name and of the French culture against all hostile influences.

There were no misunderstandings between Russia and France on financial grounds. With regard to the railway concessions in Asia Minor we succeeded fairly easily in keeping our interests apart. In religious matters, however, the position was less satisfactory. There had for a long time been a rivalry between the Orthodox and the Roman Catholic institutions in the East, especially in Palestine, sometimes leading to open conflict, which the Embassies had to settle as best they could.

On the whole Russia and France did not always succeed in harmonizing their political aims in the Near East, and this was particularly apparent whenever there arose some international conflict. This lack of harmony made itself particularly felt in Constantinople, where the French representatives often pursued a policy opposed to Russian interests.

As to England, her attitude to our political aims in European Turkey was a survival of the rivalry and mutual suspicion that prevailed in the old times when the English people, and, to a lesser extent, our people too, believed that anything advantageous to one country was for that very reason bound to be dangerous to the other. This conception, detrimental to the peace of Europe, was particularly common both in England and in Russia among the Conservatives, and it was only the Liberal Government of Gladstone that first succeeded in breaking with the old prejudices and adopting a fairer attitude to the Russian policy in the Near East. This is the reason why the memory of this statesman is respected in Russia.

After the Anglo-Russian agreement of 1907 the two countries succeeded to their mutual advantage in establishing greater friendship and mutual confidence. At the time that the agreement was concluded the post of Foreign Secretary was occupied by Sir Edward – now Lord – Grey, who was sincerely anxious, in the interests of peace, for a *rapprochement* with Russia on the basis of a fair division between our spheres of influence in Central Asia. The fact that the Liberal Government, of which he was a member, was still in power in 1914 gave me reason to suppose that our interests in the Near East, even more vital to us than those in Asia, would be dealt with just as fairly. I knew that the English were opposed to the Russian supremacy over the Turkish Straits for two reasons. In the first place, they were afraid of this important strategic point passing into the hands of the country to which the public opinion of England generally ascribed hostile designs upon India. Secondly, they believed that there ought not to be in the world a single sea the access to which could, under certain conditions, be closed to the British Fleet. As far as the Black Sea and the Straits are concerned, this belief is a mere political superstition. It is both natural and legitimate that England, as the foremost Naval Power, having to safe-

guard her political and commercial interests in both hemispheres, should desire to secure for herself free navigation on all the sea routes of the world; but it is hard to understand what she can have to fear if the Black Sea – which is an inland sea – became the property of Russia and of other countries situated on its shores. It was ridiculous to suppose that after gaining possession of the Straits, Russia would have interfered with the free navigation of Western European commercial ships in the Black Sea. Almost the whole of the Russian export and import trade was done by foreign ships and all prohibitions would, in the first instance, have damaged our own commerce.

It is clear, of course, that European politics could not have been guided by absurd considerations of this sort; in truth, both France and England set more value on the strategic than on the commercial importance of the Straits, as providing a means for attacking Russia from the sea; it is obvious that there was not a shadow of reason for ascribing to Russia the intention of attacking with her ships the Naval Powers of Western Europe. Russia is the most continental of all the European Powers, and however much her forces might develop she could never become a great Naval Power. One glance at the map is sufficient to prove this.

I decided on my personal responsibility to begin the negotiations about the Straits by a purely informal conversation with the British and the French Ambassadors. I told nothing of my intentions to my colleagues in the Council of Ministers. After the resignation of Count Kokovtsov, who was unfortunately replaced by M. Goremykin, there was no one among them with whom one could profitably discuss questions of foreign politics, while there were several people whom I had reason to fear because they disliked my political opinions and were constitutionally incapable of keeping a secret. I could entirely trust the Naval Minister, Admiral Grigorovich, a man of straightforward character and sound political judgment, but he was already acquainted with my attitude to the question of the Straits and I could rely on his support. The Minister of War, General Sukhomlinov, too klittle interest in such matters, and there was no occasion for me to consult him.

As to the Emperor Nicholas, who was keenly interested in

foreign politics and had a thorough understanding of them, I knew beforehand that he would warmly approve of my plan. The only reason why I ventured to begin negotiations with the Allied Ambassadors without asking his consent was that I did not want to involve the Tsar in the preliminary stage of negotiations of the issue of which I felt uncertain and I intended to give them, in the first instance, a purely personal character, making myself, if it came to that, responsible for the failure. I was ready to face the consequences and, if I failed, to tell the Emperor that my remaining at the head of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs was no longer in the interests of Russia. I said all this quite openly to the Allied Ambassadors, so as to leave no doubt in their minds of my firm decision to resign my post, for which there were plenty of candidates of less definite political orientation than myself; I certainly did not say this in order to bring pressure to bear upon their Governments, as was afterwards alleged by a well-known French journalist, who combined a dislike for Russia with a desire to draw every possible advantage out of the Franco-Russian Alliance. The idea of bringing pressure to bear upon our Allies was not likely to have occurred to me if only because there was little chance of the negotiations failing while Sir Edward Grey and M. Delcassé were in power; I could fully rely on their political wisdom and sense of justice. Nevertheless, of course, failure was possible, and I had to be prepared for the Allied Governments being influenced by the political prejudices to which I have referred. This was why I considered it my duty to introduce the greatest possible definiteness into our negotiations from the very first.

At the same time I was clearly aware that to attain my purpose I had to offer some compensation for the advantages that Russia would reap when her economic interests and external safety were secured. I was all the more ready to make concessions because I knew that the Tsar and the Russian people as a whole would admit that our Allies had a right to compensation; it was not necessary at that time to consider the opinion of men who were morally and intellectually poisoned by the revolutionary propaganda. Events justified my surmise, and so long as the fate of Russia was in the hands of mentally normal people no one doubted that I was right. It needed a Marxian revolution to destroy the Russian people's sympathy

with a nationalist policy; the Provisional Government was unable to resist the demoralizing influence of the baneful forces at work and the feeling of national honour, patriotism and ordinary common sense was dimmed. The military riot of February 27 developed into a mad and bloody revolution at the moment when on the German front the correlation of forces was for the first time favourable to us, and Germany, according to the Germans' own testimony, was in the greatest danger.

At the time when I began the negotiations about the Straits Russia was still sound, and a policy pursuing national ends was possible. As the negotiations developed my faith in their success increased and soon became a certainty. I was waiting to find out what the Allied Governments' attitude to the main point was before telling the Tsar of the results achieved.

I was able to do so in the second half of October, 1914. By that time it was clear that Russia's demand for the Straits would be recognized as legitimate and justified by events, even if it met with no particular sympathy in France and England – which would indeed have been too much to expect considering these countries' anti-Russian policy throughout the nineteenth century.

At that time the problem of Constantinople was hardly touched upon, and I was not opposed to the idea of making it an international city in the future. As I have said already I never wanted Russia to possess Constantinople, for I thought it would do us more harm than good. It was obviously impossible to transform the former Byzantium into a Russian town, which would of necessity have been only the third in importance in the Empire, and to make it a new Southern capital of Russia was undesirable and perhaps even dangerous.

As I had expected, the Emperor received my report about the Straits with the feeling of deepest satisfaction. He expressed it in the words which I shall never forget: 'I owe to you the happiest day in my life.'

To every Russian who looked upon his Tsar as the symbol of the national unity of his country these words were a reward in themselves, and the extreme reserve natural to the Emperor Nicholas II made them doubly precious.

In submitting to him the project of establishing the Russian

power over the Straits and internationalizing Constantinople, I dwelt at some length upon the reasons which prompted me to oppose the idea, so long cherished by many Russians, of annexing the Turkish capital. I wanted to prevent the Tsar from taking up the sentimental attitude which the patriotic Russians generally adopted towards the subject. I was afraid that the glamour of Tsargrad's name and the age-long dream of Russia placing an orthodox Cross on the cupola of Saint Sophia might prejudice the Emperor's opinion as to the fate of Constantinople.

This did not happen, but I could tell from some of his remarks that he did not think it possible for us to preserve the position we had taken up at the early stage of the negotiations. I was ready to agree with this, foreseeing that in the course of time we should have to give it up under the pressure of public opinion and strategic necessity which always overrules all other considerations. I was also aware of the endless complications in which the proposed co-dominion over Constantinople would involve us. Friction and jealousy would inevitably arise, however justly the spheres of influence and the interests of the Powers concerned were apportioned, and, as in all cases of joint occupation, this might lead to dangerous conflicts, the consequences of which it would be difficult to foresee.

The winter of 1914–15 was spent in preliminary negotiations, and by March, 1915, matters had progressed so far that I was able to express the results arrived at in the form of a diplomatic agreement. I had to do it not so much for the sake of holding our Allies to it as to satisfy the impatience of the Duma and the Russian press keenly interested in the subject that was of such vital importance to Russia. Equal interest was manifested by the military who still remembered the bitter experience of the Crimean War as well as the appearance of the British Fleet at Gallipoli at a time when, after defeating Turkey in 1877, the Russian Army had to renounce the reward, justly deserved by it, of entering Constantinople; and the impression of the German ships entering the Black Sea and bombarding our undefended ports in October, 1914, was still fresh in their minds.

It was impossible for me to conceal from the Duma that I was carrying on negotiations with our Allies about the Straits

and that I had hopes of success; and our War and Naval Departments were, of course, fully informed of what was happening. As I had feared, more and more pressure was brought to bear upon the Ministry of Foreign Affairs with regard to the Constantinople question. The project of internationalizing it receded into the background; the prospect of co-dominion satisfied no one. Public opinion, as reflected by the Duma and the military circles, regarded it as distinctly dangerous to the Russian control of the Straits, which every one recognized to be necessary. I might have opposed the desires of the public that sprang from an ancient and respectable tradition of a sentimental rather than a political character, but I was helpless against the military and had to capitulate, although I was not altogether convinced by their arguments. There is no arguing with the General Staff on questions of strategy.

Now that our demands included Constantinople, I found it more difficult to make headway in my negotiations with the Ambassadors of our Allies. England's attitude, however, was fairly definite. Soon after the German ships were allowed by Turkey, at the request of the German Ambassador, to break into the Black Sea and attack the Russian ports, Sir Edward Grey informed me that the British Government consented to abandon to us the Straits; and on February 1, 1915, this was officially confirmed to me by the British Ambassador. There could be no doubt of England's friendly intention to consider the desires of Russia in a matter on which it had seemed hardly possible for us to come to an agreement, and I took the opportunity of telling the British Government in general terms what territorial acquisitions seemed to us necessary in order to ensure our safety on the Black Sea. Our demands were as follows: on the European shore, Turkish power was to be abolished; the line Enos-Media uniting the Ægean with the Black Sea was to be the frontier between us and Bulgaria; on the Asiatic shore the frontier was to run along the river Sakaria, and our position in the Straits was to be secured by giving us the southern shore of the Sea of Marmora. At the same time the economic interests of Rumania, Bulgaria and Asiatic Turkey, as well as those of the West-European commerce, were to be taken into consideration by us. In this original project Constantinople was not mentioned, but the attitude of the Russian

Government towards that city might be deduced from its intention to put an end to Turkish dominion in Europe.

Our position with regard to France was less definite and required to be made clear. I entrusted this task to our Ambassador in Paris, Isvolsky, in the hope that the friendship which the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Delcassé, had for Russia would help us to reach an agreement for which neither the French Government nor the public opinion of France was as yet prepared.

In spite of Delcassé's goodwill, however, the French negotiations advanced but slowly. It was not an easy matter to persuade the Cabinet and the French press to adopt the Russian point of view in a question of such vital importance to Russia. The abstract and theoretical character of the French reasoning proved to be a great hindrance to the progress of the negotiations.

I approached the subject with the French and English Ambassadors at the same time and continued the discussions in both countries through our Ambassadors, and I soon came to the conclusion that France and England were not agreed about the Straits. While I received news from London that our demands were accepted, in Paris they still insisted on making the Straits neutral and internationalizing Constantinople after the manner of Tangiers. Neutralization of the Straits is the worst possible solution from Russia's point of view, and the Russian Government had never concealed the fact that it preferred the Straits to remain in Turkish hands to having them neutral. Places of strategic importance may be allowed to remain neutral only when the Power concerned possesses sufficient military force to defend them in case of need; this is the case, for instance, with the Suez Canal, both shores of which, though they belong to Egypt, are controlled by the English. The neutralization of the Turkish Straits would have been a mere fiction and, in truth, they would have been under the control of the strongest Naval Power. Every one knows that Russia has never aspired to that rank and, indeed, its geographical position prevents her from ever attaining it. All this is so obvious that even the Bolsheviks hesitated before signing the Lausanne treaty, although, as can be seen from the Brest-Litovsk and Riga treaties, their views on the Government's

duty to defend the integrity of the national territory were very light.

Although we had hesitated some time about the status of Constantinople, our position with regard to the Straits was perfectly definite, and my conversation with M. Paléologue and Sir George Buchanan left them no possibility of doubt on that score. Nevertheless, there was every sign to show that in Paris the Russian point of view met with no response; it was in direct opposition to the opinion that had become firmly established during the long years when France had political differences with Russia and sometimes was in open conflict with her. The *mariage de convenance* between them at the end of the last century was inspired by their common fear of Germany and had not improved matters; the idea of Russians owning the Straits and Constantinople continued to alarm the French, who do not easily adapt themselves to changes in the accustomed order of things.

The Russian Government recognized that France had considerable cultural and financial interests in Constantinople and Turkey as a whole and, therefore, in making its claim to the Turkish legacy in Europe it declared that so far from interfering with these rights it would guarantee them afresh by making an agreement with the French Government. The value of such a guarantee was obvious. Some four milliards of French money were invested in Turkey, but twice that amount was invested in Russia, and it was obvious that so long as the Russian Empire existed the interests of our foreign creditors would be protected by the State; in the past it faithfully watched over them even at the most trying periods of Russian history.

As to the cultural interests of France in Turkey, most of her religious and educational institutions were scattered in Asiatic Turkey and a change in the political situation in Europe could not affect them.

Since I am not writing a diplomatic history of the Great War – for that we shall have to wait many years yet – but am merely recording my personal reminiscences and impressions, I will not give a detailed account of my negotiations with France and England about the Straits and Constantinople, but will only say that, on the whole, they went on smoothly

and, considering the extreme importance of the subject, fairly quickly.

At the end of winter, 1915, the theatre of war in the Near East was extended, for the Anglo-French troops opened a campaign in European Turkey, quite close to the Turkish capital and the Dardanelles, where considerable naval and land forces had been sent. The latter landed on the north coast of the Dardanelles Peninsula, reckoning to make a simultaneous movement against Constantinople and the Straits to get possession of them and thus deal a knock-out blow to Turkey.

The prospect was certainly very alluring, and had it been realized the war would have soon been finished in favour of the Entente Powers, for then Germany would have been cut off from Turkey and Bulgaria, and Serbia's security assured in the South-east.

I do not know whether the Anglo-French forces were insufficient or the strategic plan of the campaign wrongly conceived and badly carried out, but in any case the expedition cost the Allies tremendous sacrifices and ended in failure. I believe it has not been discovered to this day at whose initiative the campaign had been undertaken. Our former Allies affirm that the Russian General Staff thought of it in the first instance with a view to helping our operations in Asia Minor, and that the plan of the campaign was worked out by Mr. Winston Churchill, at that time the First Lord of the Admiralty.

I was very much in sympathy with the idea of the French and English troops driving in a wedge between Turkey and the Central Powers, but I intensely disliked the thought that the Straits and Constantinople might be taken by our Allies and not by the Russian forces. It seemed to me that Austria and Germany could have been divided from Turkey at a smaller risk if the Allied troops had been sent from Macedonia to the Bulgarian frontier. That movement would have paralysed all King Ferdinand's military plans and have made his treachery impossible. When the Gallipoli expedition was finally decided upon by our Allies the French and the English Ambassadors informed me of this during one of their daily visits. I had difficulty in concealing from them how painfully the news had affected me. But I contented myself with

saying, 'Remember it was not I who asked you to undertake this expedition.

Another reason why I was opposed to the Gallipoli campaign was that, in my opinion, the Allies were not likely to succeed if they approached Constantinople from the narrow Dardanelles Peninsula, especially as the forts, both at Constantinople and the Straits, had long been in German hands, and during the first six months of war had been thoroughly overhauled and considerably improved. But as I was not a military man my opinion could have no weight. My impressions and more or less reasonable apprehensions had value for no one but myself, and so I did not force them upon anyone.

The Gallipoli expedition developed slowly and unsuccessfully, but its progress had no effect on my negotiations with London and Paris, started the previous autumn. I had to continue them unremittingly till our rights to the Straits and to Constantinople were recognized. For our part we were ready to concede all the Allies' demands for territorial concessions in those parts of Turkey where their main political and economic interests were centred.

Gradually the English and the French Governments had gone so far as to meet the Russian demands for the Straits and Constantinople and I was able on March 17, 1915, to send the Russian Ambassadors in Paris and London the following telegram, composed in collaboration with Sir George Buchanan: 'The recent course of events has convinced His Majesty the Emperor Nicholas II that the question of Constantinople and the Straits must be finally settled in accordance with Russia's age-long desires. We could not be satisfied with any proposal which did not allot to the Russian Empire the city of Constantinople, the west coast of the Bosphorus, the Sea of Marmora and the Dardanelles, as well as Southern Thrace as far as the Enos-Media line. Similarly, the part of the Asiatic coast between the Bosphorus, the river Sakaria and a point to be defined on the coast of the Izmid Bay, and the islands Imbros and Tenedos must, for strategic reasons, be given to Russia. The special interests of France and Great Britain in the region in question will be scrupulously observed. The Imperial Government hopes that the above-mentioned demands will be favourably received by both the

Allied Governments. In carrying out their own plans in Turkey and outside of it they can in their turn reckon on the goodwill of the Imperial Government.'

I quote this telegram in full because its text had served as the basis for an agreement between Russia and her Allies. As the negotiations continued the project delineated in it was extended to include Asiatic Turkey. Russia's demands had been accumulating for centuries, and were a legacy from past generations, but in insisting upon them Russia in no way opposed her Allies' demands for expansion in those parts of Asiatic Turkey to which they had a claim.

It was essential for us to establish the Russian power in the region of Asia Minor adjoining the Russian Transcaucasia. Ethnologically it was hardly Turkish at all, and continual risings were taking place there and being put down with incredible cruelty. The provinces in question were inhabited by perhaps the most unhappy Christian population under Turkish rule. I have already discussed the significance of the Armenian vilayets in relation to the peace and welfare of the Russian Transcaucasia.

There was another Turkish province that had a great importance in the eyes of the Russian people – Palestine. For centuries an endless stream of pilgrims from Russia went to the Holy Land; Russian pilgrims outnumbered those from all other Christian countries taken together. Consequently, the Orthodox Palestine Society was formed; it had large means and spread a network of religious and educational institutions throughout Palestine and a part of Syria. These institutions were of such national importance that they enjoyed the special protection of our Ambassador in Constantinople and of the local Consuls. According to the general rule, that in the East everything is in one way or another connected with politics, these institutions, essentially non-political, acquired a certain political significance as indicative of Russian influence. In my conversations with our Allies about the changes to be made in the political status of Turkey after the war, the question of Palestine was discussed, too. Russia claimed no special rights or privileges for herself there, but merely wished to preserve the position she had attained in Palestine under the Turkish rule, and, first and foremost, required that her pilgrims should

be freely admitted to the Holy Land whatever régime might be established there.

The whole of March, 1915, passed in negotiations between St. Petersburg, London and Paris, concerning Constantinople and the Straits. They proceeded quite satisfactorily although not at the same rate, England being more amenable than France. Delcassé could not help acknowledging that the Russian demands were quite fair, and that it was time to put an end to a policy that kept a great and friendly Power with a population of a hundred and seventy millions in a mousetrap, open to her enemies but with no outlet for herself. Delcassé's colleagues in the Cabinet and public opinion of France, imbued with the old political ideas, found it very difficult to get accustomed to a new conception, and Delcassé had to fight hard to overcome their resistance.

In England, too, many people were reluctant to break with the deeply rooted traditions of Queen Victoria's reign; hostility to Russia [1] had been bequeathed to her by her husband, Prince Albert of Coburg. But it is characteristic of the English people that once they have made up their minds to take a certain step, even an unusual and disagreeable one, they do not keep looking back but get it over quickly, as one swallows a bitter pill. I have already referred to the justice and impartiality of Sir Edward Grey's Russian policy long before the war; these rare qualities made themselves strongly felt during the negotiations about the Straits and Constantinople. I think of his dealings with Russia at that fateful hour with a feeling of genuine gratitude.

By the end of March all that remained to be done was to make a formal agreement in writing. The essential question was satisfactorily settled and the Allies now wanted the Russian Government to guarantee the freedom of navigation in the Straits and in the Black Sea.

At the very beginning of the negotiations I said that we agreed as a matter of principle fully to safeguard the economic interests of our Allies and the countries situated on the shores

[1] In the recently published memoirs of Lord Bertie, English Ambassador in Paris during the war, the author's hostility to the Russian policy takes the form of most unseemly attacks upon me.

of the Black Sea, as well as of all friendly Powers. The exact formulation of the guarantees was to be deferred till the drawing up of the Peace Treaty.

On March 27 Sir George Buchanan handed over a memorandum he had penned on the strength of instructions received from London. It confirmed the British Government's consent to Russia's annexation of Constantinople and the Straits on condition that the war should be brought to a victorious issue, and that France and England should satisfy their claims at the expense of the Ottoman Empire and of certain regions outside of it. The memorandum laid down as a condition 'war till final victory,' although it was obvious that apart from this condition there could be no question of acquiring any part of the Turkish territory. I was firmly convinced from the very beginning of the war that the Triple Entente was determined to see it through and that it would be victorious. I little thought that the only country that failed to observe that condition would be my own; disabled by the revolution Russia gave up the struggle at the very moment when she was at last fully equipped for the war, and had to make just one last effort in order to reap the fruits of three years' bitter conflict.

The condition included in the English memorandum seemed to me, therefore, to have no practical significance; the revolution performed the unenviable task of making that condition real. The full meaning of what has happened is not yet apparent to most of our compatriots because of the personal sufferings most of them have endured and of the terrible experience they have had of seeing the destruction of Russia. The future generations, however, will be able to see clearly what price the Russian people had to pay for repudiating, at the behest of the International, their debt of honour and the claims of their own national past.

The English memorandum also included the following points: a free port was to be made in Constantinople for the warehousing and transport of goods intended for Asia Minor and Southern Europe, not including Russia; Arabia and the Mahometan holy places were to be under independent Mahometan rule; the Anglo-Russian Treaty of 1907 was to be revised and the neutral zone in Persia was to pass into the English sphere of influence. Our Allies' territorial acquisitions at

the expense of the Ottoman Empire were further defined later on in personal negotiations between myself and their representatives, Sir Mark Sykes and M. Picot. In April, 1916, these negotiations were finished and the wishes of each of the members of the Triple Entente clearly stated; I then informed the Allies' Ambassadors in St. Petersburg by letter that the Imperial Government consented that England should annex Mesopotamia and France annex Syria and Cilicia, on condition that Russia acquired in Asia Minor Erzeroum, Trebizond, Van and Bitlis and the Black Sea coast as far as a point which was to be determined when the new frontier was made. The part of Kurdistan south of Van and Bitlis was also to be taken over by Russia, and in exchange France was to acquire a considerable portion of Asia Minor, including the town of Kharput. Such was in general outline the agreement concluded in 1916 between the Russian Government and the Allies' representatives.

Owing to the catastrophe that has overtaken her, Russia has made no territorial acquisitions and lost a great deal of her old territory. Our Allies, too, had to renounce some of the Turkish provinces they had planned to annex, and to establish over the others a more or less fictitious protectorate which has, so far, been of doubtful advantage to them.

I return to the events of the spring, 1915. The Gallipoli campaign held little promise of success, but in spite of this the Entente Governments were discussing provisional arrangements to be made with regard to Constantinople on the assumption that it would soon be taken. The final destiny of the Turkish capital had already been agreed upon by Russia, France and England, but it had yet to be settled what was to be done with it for the duration of the war. A project was drawn up for the city of Constantinople to be administered both by military and civil authorities. We maintained that civil authority as represented by the High Commissioners of the Powers ought not to be subject to the control of the Chief Commander of the Allies' military forces. It was proposed to establish six departments to superintend all branches of civil administration, and each of the Allied Governments was to appoint the chiefs of two departments. Russia reserved for herself the departments of Law and Internal Affairs; the

property of Mahometan religious institutions was to be administered by a Mahometan.

I do not touch here upon the project for local jurisdiction, as it was the most specialized part of the proposed plan, none of which was ever carried out owing to the utter failure of the Gallipoli Expedition. The Anglo-French contingents had to be speedily recalled to avoid an irremediable catastrophe. This episode of the war considerably damaged the cause of the Entente, both morally and materially, and correspondingly increased the self-confidence of its enemies. Turkey, which had begun the war under pressure from the German Ambassador, Wangenheim, was more than ever convinced of German invincibility, and began, indeed, to believe in her own. The Balkan clients of Germany became still more closely united to her and served her interests with a self-abnegation for which they had to pay dearly in the end. The blows dealt to the Turks by the Russian Army in far distant Asia Minor made little impression on Constantinople, which was firmly held by the Germans. The situation changed only much later after the Balkan victories of Marshal Franchet-d'Espérey. These victories made the Turks and the Bulgarians realize how hopeless their position had become and thus brought nearer the German defeat on the Western Front.

The importance of that defeat cannot be over-estimated, but by the time it was achieved Russia was no longer with the victors. Her people were then engaged in creating a proletarian republic built upon the bones of the best sons of the former Russia. The Russian Marxists cut themselves off from the civilized Powers and made the nation swallow poison at the very moment when Russia needed her spiritual and material resources more than she had ever done before. I use the metaphor of taking poison and not of committing suicide, since fortunately no poison is strong enough to destroy the young and vigorous organism of the Russian people.

CHAPTER XI

The war of 1914 took unawares not only the opponents of Austria and Germany, which was natural enough, but also their own allies. This was, of course, a disadvantage to Austria and Germany and was all the more strange because neither in Berlin nor in Vienna any illusions were entertained about the strength of the bond that united them to Italy and Rumania, both of which benefited by any weakening of Austria-Hungary. It must be supposed that Austria, firmly convinced of Germany's military superiority, overlooked all these considerations in the hope of attracting the wavering allies to her side by her successes in the war, especially as she did not regard those allies as quite her equals. The events, as we all know, shattered these hopes: Italy and Rumania remained neutral. It soon became apparent that they were not friendly to the Central Powers but remained neutral only because, and so long as, they were not ready for war. Being a great Power, Italy could get ready sooner than Rumania, which had limited means and a small population.

Keen as these countries were to attack their recent allies, they had, before taking the final plunge, to agree with their new allies about the advantages they were to reap from joining them. Both Italy and Rumania were anxious to include within their frontiers members of their own race living under the Hapsburg rule. Had Vienna been prepared to satisfy their desires even in part, Italy and Rumania might have been content with a temporary compromise and, wishing to avoid the enormous risk and sacrifices of war, would have refrained from taking the step which hastened the downfall of Austria. This would have been both to the advantage of Austria and of Germany, but here again the German Government failed to influence Austria at the right moment and did nothing to check her obstinacy. Perhaps Germany was afraid to lose the support of her ally when she needed it most, or she may have thought that the time for diplomatic bargaining had already been lost, but in any case it soon became evident both in Rome and in Bucharest that it was hopeless to reach an agreement with Vienna and that the Entente Powers alone held out the promise of advantages to be gained.

Consequently, soon after the declaration of war the Entente Cabinets opened negotiations with Rome and Bucharest, concerning territorial concessions which the Entente were prepared to make to Italy and Rumania at the expense of Austria in case the Central Powers were defeated.

The Russian Government made it its rule not to interfere with its Allies' plans with regard to changing the map of Western Europe, since this was of secondary importance to us, reserving for ourselves the casting vote on matters relating to Southern and South-eastern Europe where our interests were immediately concerned. The territorial claims of Italy included not only Istria and the southern slopes of the Alps, but also certain portions of the eastern shores of the Adriatic, while Rumania claimed the south-eastern districts of the Hapsburg Empire; hence the Russian Government was faced with the hard task of coming to terms with both countries while preserving the interests of our South-eastern Allies. From the very first day when Rumania and Italy expressed their readiness to enter into negotiations I saw how difficult our position would be. I confess that their demands seemed to me exaggerated. It was quite legitimate that Italy should desire a strategic frontier in the North which would make her for ever safe from the threat of invasion through the Alpine passes which were in the hands of Austria, but I did not think Italy was justified in demanding the greater part of the coast of Dalmatia and the adjoining islands, almost entirely populated by Slavs. In making this claim the Italians asserted it was necessary for their safety to hold both shores of the Adriatic. I made every effort to persuade them that their position on the Adriatic would be perfectly secure if they had Taranto, Ancona, Venice, Trieste, Pola and Valona – upon which at that time they set great value – especially as there was hardly any probability of Serbia becoming a strong naval power even if it annexed Dalmatia. Italy, however, insisted on having all she asked for on the Adriatic shore and on the part intended for Serbia being neutralized.

It was important for the Triple Entente that Italy should enter the war, and so our Allies urged the Russian Government to be as amenable as possible over the Adriatic question. I quite realized the value of an alliance with Italy both from the

point of view of the Entente, as a whole, and of Russia in particular, for Italy could be of help to us in our struggle against Austria which caused us to keep considerable forces on the South-western front while we needed them more in the North-west against Germany. It cost me a great effort to sacrifice to the advantages of the Italian alliance the interest of the Serbian people, whose desires could be realized only through the Great War. Serbia would, in any case, have an outlet to the sea, but a considerable part of the Serbian population would be excluded from their own country. There was another thing that troubled me as sure to involve serious political complications in the future. The division of the territory along the shores of the Adriatic, according to the Italian Government's plan, was bound to lead after a time to a conflict between Italy and Serbia, dangerous to the peace of Europe. It was certainly undesirable to create on the Adriatic a new hotbed of national conflicts, in addition to those that would naturally arise after the war. To the credit of Italian statesmanship this danger has now been removed, fortunately for the parties concerned and for Europe as a whole. The friendly relations established between Italy and Yugoslavia, through a mutual give-and-take, serve, to some extent, as a guarantee that the two neighbouring nations, one of which is already fully developed and the other is just unfolding its material and spiritual resources, will continue to live on peaceable terms. One can only wish that the good example set by them of settling international conflicts by friendly agreement may be followed by other European nations. This is particularly desirable at the present time when the League of Nations, with its complicated and unwieldy organization, has not as yet acquired due authority, so that its decisions are sometimes overlooked.

Negotiations about Italy joining the Entente continued until May, 1915, when she declared war on Austria. During that time Italy had done a great deal to prepare herself for war and to reorganize for the purpose her numerous and well-equipped metal works. The ten months of diplomatic and technical preparatory work had not been wasted by Italy either in the political or in the military sense.

Negotiations with Rumania, the main brunt of which fell upon the Russian Government, could not be said to progress successfully or rapidly. The Rumanian Government, represented by M. Bratiano, occupied from the first an equivocal position. In spite of the insistence of King Charles, who believed in Germany's victory and was anxious to do his duty as her ally, Rumania refused to side with the Central Powers, but behaved so ambiguously that the Entente could not for a long time feel certain whether she would follow Italy's example or join her former allies. Meanwhile Rumania was willing to negotiate with St. Petersburg in order to find out what reward Russia would offer her for finally breaking with the Central Powers and throwing in her lot with the Entente. At the very beginning of the negotiations I gathered that Rumania's hesitation was due to her uncertainty as to which side was going to win and the fear of backing the wrong horse. Such an attitude made negotiations very difficult and was extremely trying to the Entente Governments, who did not, however, censure Rumania too harshly, knowing that she was utterly unprepared for war. In spite of this lack of preparedness, however, Rumania made such exorbitant demands for territorial compensation that more than once the negotiations were on the point of being broken off. There was no difficulty about giving Rumania parts of Hungary, populated by Rumanians, who were anxious to escape from the Magyar yoke; it was a foregone conclusion that they should be united to Rumania. Difficulties arose when M. Bratiano claimed provinces in which the Rumanian element was much less prevalent, as for instance in Bukovina and Banat, where Russian and Serbian interests were involved.

The question of Rumania's entrance into the war caused some difference between the Entente Powers. In the opinion of the Russian Government it was more important to bring about a breach between Rumania and the Central Powers, thus securing her neutrality, than to obtain her active help. Owing to her natural wealth Rumania is an important economic factor in the South-east of Europe. Her supplies of corn and oil which Germany and Austria acutely needed gave her quite an exceptional importance during the war. To deprive our enemies of the Rumanian imports was my chief

concern and we were ready to pay Rumania a good price for her compliance.

As to her active participation in the war, it was inconvenient and positively risky, since it imposed upon us duties which would be bound to disorganize our military plans. Considering our imperfect military organization this was a serious matter for us. To be always ready to help a weak ally was a task for which Germany was better fitted than we were, and even she found it difficult.

Rumania's active help could have been useful to us under two conditions only: if she had opened war on Austria at the time of General Brusilov's advance, leading to the fall of Lvov and Przemysl early in 1915, and if instead of hastening to occupy Transylvania – which, after the final victory of the Allies, would have fallen to her share in any case – she had attacked Bulgaria and thus prevented the rout of Serbia owing to which Germany gained free access into Turkey. Rumania fulfilled neither of these conditions and, bent on pursuing her own narrow ends, demanded that Russia should protect her southern frontier against a possible invasion of Bulgaria into Dobrudja.

It is worth while quoting here the opinion of an impartial foreign authority, the French General Buat,[1] with regard to the position taken up by Rumania during the early stage of the war. In his work, published after the end of the war, he maintains that had Rumania declared war on Austria at the right moment, that is, during General Brusilov's advance, this might have had a decisive consequence for the issue of the war; but in August, 1916, it was too late.

General Buat's opinion was entirely shared by the Russian military circles and by me. The days of my remaining at the head of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs were numbered. Stürmer, who replaced me, differed from me on this subject, as indeed on every other; to take the point of view contrary to mine saved him the trouble of forming a judgment of his own on questions of foreign politics. At the insistence of our Allies the chief of the Russian Staff, General Alexeiev, had to require at the end of August, 1916, that Rumania should open hostilities against Austria at once, under penalty of losing the

[1] General Buat, *Hindenburg et Ludendorff*. Pages 165, 166.

advantages that had been promised to her. Stürmer considered this as a great diplomatic success, but in truth it was a serious mistake, and General Alexeiev was well aware of it. We were not strong enough to carry Rumania on our shoulders out of the deadly conflict. Two years of a strenuous war which had taken us unawares had made terrible gaps in our army and reduced its equipment, never quite satisfactory, to a deplorable condition. Every soldier and every gun were needed for keeping the Germans within the line at which we had succeeded in stopping their invasion into Russian territory; now we had to help and protect a new ally who had not been able during the years of doubts and hesitations to get prepared for war.

Subsequent events soon proved that Rumania's military help was as dangerous to us as her friendly neutrality had been useful. A short time after she entered the war a catastrophe overtook her army and brought the country to the verge of ruin from which she was only rescued by an inglorious peace connected with Marghiloman's name. The King and Queen displayed at that trying time great firmness and patriotism and remained true to their alliance with the Entente. The final victory of our Allies on the Western front alone saved Rumania; thanks to it she escaped the consequences of the terrible disaster that had nearly destroyed her and made considerable territorial acquisitions. It must be confessed that these acquisitions were out of all proportion to the part she played in the war; as to her seizure of Bessarabia, the violation of a solemn pledge was perhaps the most innocent of the tricks by which she obtained it.

The Moldavians, freed by us in 1812 from the Turkish yoke, had always been loyal to Russia, and during the hundred years of kind and reasonable Russian administration Bessarabia had become one of the most flourishing provinces of the Empire. The bitter fate that has overtaken it was, of course, entirely due to the downfall of the lawful national Government that had watched over the integrity of the Russian territory and to the fact that it was replaced by international Bolshevism, bred by the Revolution, and opposed to the idea of nationality and to frontiers between nations.

The population of Bessarabia, consisting in the four

northern districts chiefly of Moldavians and in the three southern of a mixture of races, was indignant at being forcibly united to Rumania. This was supposed to have been done for the sake of restoring the national unity of the Moldavian people, said to have been torn from their Fatherland by Russia in 1812. I have already touched upon this subject, treated by the public opinion of Europe with a levity which can only be explained by an insufficient knowledge of history. Our former Allies who were acquainted with the facts also expressed no concern about the seizure of Bessarabia and her two million population, whose wishes were not consulted and who were given over like some African savages into another country's possession. This act of violence was officially sanctioned by the Allies. Their recognition of Rumania's seizure of Bessarabia has been bitterly resented by the Russians, and it will be long before this wound is healed. I would not take upon myself to explain the cause of the Allies' decision nor determine the degree of responsibility of the statesmen concerned. One thing is certain, however – that in tearing Bessarabia from Russia the Allies unconsciously carried out the wishes of Germany, who, at the beginning of the war, promised that province to the Rumanians as a reward for their fighting against the Entente. At that time Rumania was sensible enough to refuse this dangerous gift, but with the rise of Bolshevism things were completely changed and she seized Bessarabia which was no longer defended by anyone. I have heard it said that France and England consented to Rumania's doing so because it was a means of saving Bessarabia from the horrors of the Bolshevik invasion. It is obvious, of course, that in spite of its innumerable defects the Rumanian rule is less harmful for this prosperous land than the Bolshevik régime, but this does not alter the essential fact: Bessarabia, as a whole, had never had any political connection with the Rumanian state. Even the southern districts, in which the Moldavians are in a minority, were joined to the Danube principalities by the Treaty of Paris as late as 1856 and belonged to Rumania for a short period only, from the moment that Rumania became a Principality to the time of the Berlin Congress.

I do not know who is to be blamed for the wrong done both to Russia and Bessarabia, but it is easy enough to account for

France's motive in this matter. The downfall of the Russian Empire and the establishment of Bolshevism caused many French statesmen radically to change their estimate of the value of the Russian alliance. Several of them had always been hostile to monarchy in general and to the Russian monarchy in particular, and their only reason for an alliance with Russia was their perpetual fear of Germany. The success of the Bolsheviks, unexpected by every one including themselves, released our French ill-wishers from the obligation to reckon with an ally they had always disliked, especially now that ally was *hors de combat.* Besides, some of the French politicians wished to create for themselves in Eastern Europe clients who could, in case of need, act as allies, and Rumania might be of use in that capacity. To the regret of the Russian friends of France, it never occurred to our former Allies to consider the striking similarity in the position of Bessarabia and Alsace-Lorraine, which was an integral part of France, though there was no racial or linguistic bond between them. The cultural bond was so strong that nearly fifty years of German rule made no difference to the provinces' love of France, in spite of the fact that membership of the German Empire gave them considerable material advantages. Rumanian rule will certainly not give Bessarabia any such advantages, and her union with people of the same race living in Rumania will bring to her more loss than gain. The example of Alsace-Lorraine has proved that 'memory of the heart' must be reckoned with even in politics. Russia has faith that the beautiful province torn from her will yet revert to her and that the injustice of which she has been the victim will be remedied at the insistence of the Bessarabian people, whose desires will always find a warm response in Russia.

As I write these lines I recall the Conference of the Ambassadors on the subject of Bessarabia; the Russian political delegation that met in Paris after the Armistice of 1918 was for the first and last time in its existence invited to attend a meeting of the Conference. MM. de Giers, V. A. Maklakov and myself were present. Defending the Russian point of view with regard to Bessarabia, we maintained that it was impossible to settle its fate without holding a plebiscite to ascertain the wishes of the people themselves. This was required by the

most elementary justice and was in keeping with the principle of national self-determination upheld by President Wilson. We insisted that the plebiscite should first be held in the four provinces chiefly populated by Moldavians, so that the question of union with Rumania should be decided by the part of the population for whose benefit it was proposed. To let the Moldavians themselves settle the Bessarabian question seemed to us best, and one would have thought no objection could be raised to such a reasonable suggestion.

Rumanian representatives were not present at the meeting to which we were invited as the representatives of Russia; M. Bratiano was heard by them separately. A friend of mine, who was a member of the Conference, told me on the following day that M. Bratiano was very much upset by the Russian suggestion of holding a plebiscite in Bessarabia without any interference from the Rumanian officials or the Army of Occupation. Bratiano knew perfectly well what the real attitude of the Bessarabian people was and was well aware that, even in the purely Moldavian districts, Rumania would not receive a single vote, to say nothing of the southern part of the province populated chiefly by Russians, German colonists, Bulgarians, Jews and Gypsies. Bratiano was so certain of this that he did his best to induce the Conference to reject our proposal, and, indeed, it was quite natural that a representative of Rumania should take this attitude towards a plebiscite, dangerous to his Government. He achieved his end and the question of plebiscite was first put off for a later date and, finally, avoided altogether by the simple recognition of the Rumanian annexation of Bessarabia. This decision of the Ambassadors' Conference caused even the Bolsheviks to protest, and is bound to have an unfavourable effect on the future relations between Russia and Rumania.

I cannot close this chapter without recalling the political regeneration of the Czecho-Slovak people, with whom we are in closer sympathy than with any other Western Slavs. It stood in no need of a national regeneration although it had lived for centuries under a foreign yoke. Having lost their independence the Czechs retained their patriotic hopes and memories, never forgetting their former glory and independence and religiously guarding their national culture.

Heavily oppressed by the Austrian-Magyar yoke the Czecho-Slovaks preserved a clear consciousness of being a Slav race, united by a blood-tie to the great Russian people. As early as the eighteenth century they entered into cultural relations with us; the glorious names of Dobrovski, the father of Slavism, Jungman, Schafarik, Palacki and of a considerable number of distinguished scholars and politicians must be remembered in this connection.

Slavism, as a cultural movement for the national self-determination of the Slav people, acquired in the nineteenth century certain characteristics misunderstood by Western Europe, which christened the awakening of the Slavs from their age-long slumber by the name of Pan-Slavism. This word has never had any real meaning, for it did not refer to any movement for political unity and was invented merely for the sake of frightening the public opinion of Western Europe with the ghost of the Slav danger. It must be confessed that in this respect 'Pan-Slavism' played its part very well. All the Western European Powers believed in the Slav menace and interpreted Pan-Slavism as a political formula that concealed Russia's ambitious plan for uniting all the Slav peoples under her power. Austria-Hungary was particularly alarmed, for she had a numerous Slav population which she never succeeded either in amalgamating with herself or even in reconciling to her rule. She only succeeded with the Poles at the cost of making them complete masters of the Ukrainian population in Galicia. Northern Germany, too, had a big Slav population, but the Germans set to work in good time and succeeded in absorbing their Slavs completely at that period of European history when the national consciousness of peoples that were politically weak had not yet asserted itself. Nevertheless the Germans shared the Austrians' hatred for the Slavs with whom they came into contact once more at the epoch of the division of Poland. It is easy enough to understand Austria's fears of the Pan-Slavism bogey; but the wide use made of it by the German press can only be explained by purely political ends – by a desire perhaps to counteract in the eyes of Europe the Pan-German agitation to which a great many Conservative German writers and men of learning devoted their energies.

If by Pan-Slavism, of which we knew nothing in Russia,

were meant the Slavophil tendencies very popular among us in the nineteenth century, it was utterly mistaken to ascribe to them any definite political significance. All that the Slavophil movement did was to preserve the spiritual and cultural bond between Russia and the Southern and Western Slavs. It was only in the seventies of the last century that the Slavophil movement acquired a political character, when the Turks bitterly persecuted the Slavs who tried by a series of rebellions to improve their lot. The peoples of Western Europe, especially the English, whose chief spokesman was Gladstone, sympathized with the victims of the Turkish atrocities, while Germany and Austria remained indifferent.

As might have been expected in Russia the persecution of the Balkan Slavs created so much feeling that, under the pressure of public opinion, the Government had to declare war on Turkey for the sake of liberating the Bulgarians who were in danger of being exterminated. In this case the Slavophil ideas penetrating into the public mind certainly did lead to consequences of a purely political character. But there was not a trace of Pan-Slavism in the unanimous and irresistible burst of public feeling for the Bulgarians; there can be no doubt that the crusade of 1877 was not the outcome of any definite political plan but was obviously improvised on the spur of the moment, and begun with insufficient military forces after a hasty and unsatisfactory diplomatic preparation.

Our *rapprochement* with the Czech people began, as I have already said, in the sphere of ideas, but soon acquired a practical character owing to considerable emigration of Czechs to the South-western provinces of Russia where they were welcomed by the Russian Government and given land. Czech emigrants were expert farmers; they soon grew accustomed to their new surroundings and became very prosperous – some of them, indeed, remarkably so. Then there appeared another category of emigrants. At the time when the Ministry of Education was keen on the compulsory teaching of classics in secondary schools, hoping thereby to weaken the Revolutionary movement, it engaged a number of Czech teachers of Latin and Greek; there is scarcely a man of my generation in Russia who has not at one time been taught by them. I do not

know whether we have become better philologists in consequence, but we have certainly preserved a kind remembrance of our teachers. On their side the Czechs who emigrated to Russia, or merely spent a certain number of years there, grew attached to it as to a second Fatherland; and although they found there political restrictions which reminded them to some extent of the régime they had left behind, these restrictions in Russia involved no element of ill-will which made them so unendurable at home. Monarchical Russia was not a land of liberty, but police supervision there had a homely character, so that most of the new settlers easily resigned themselves to it. Speaking generally, life in Russia was free and pleasant for all who did not try to undermine the country's political foundations; this is unanimously confirmed by the innumerable foreigners who lived there, including our friends the Czechs; and many persons of different nationality, who had tasted Russian hospitality, have often said to me that they were eager to return there at the first opportunity.

Austria's participation in the war brought into the foreground several national problems, and the restoration of the Czech independence was naturally one of them. Hardly any nation in Europe had as much right to independence as the Czechs. The glorious history of their State and their ancient national culture, which had been preserved intact during the three centuries of foreign dominion, gave them an exceptional position in the family of the Slav nations. The unfaltering loyalty of the best national leaders and of the masses of the Czech people to the Slav ideals inspired us, Russians, with profound respect. When in the course of the war the opponents of Austria had to consider the possible changes to be made in the political map of Europe after the downfall of the Hapsburg Monarchy, they were at once confronted with the question of the restoration of the Czech State. Both the Emperor Nicholas II and I, who directed Russian foreign policy, were convinced that no doubts could be entertained as to the justice of such a restoration, and the public opinion of Russia was at one with us. I am speaking, of course, of the principle involved, i.e. of the union of all the Czechs into one independent State within a territory that would secure its free development. Russia left all details to the decision of the

Czech people themselves, whose political maturity she did not call in question, reserving for herself, when the moment came, the privilege of actively helping them to realize their desires.

Soon after the war began I received a deputation consisting of eleven members of the Czech National Committee, who put before me their plans for the future and their hopes in Russia's help. It was a great pleasure to me to listen to the delegates, since I was in genuine sympathy with their wishes. They asked me to arrange for them an interview with the Tsar, so that they might lay their hopes before him in person. A short time before, another Czech delegation, which had been received by His Majesty in the Kremlin, expressed a wish that 'the free and independent crown of St. Waçlav should shine in the rays of the Romanov's crown.'

When I submitted to His Majesty the petition of the Czech Delegation, the Emperor said that he would receive them with pleasure. In the middle of September the delegates were received by him at Tsarskoié-Sélo. The Czechs asked permission to create one single organization to supervise the Czecho-Slovak Movement throughout the Empire. The Tsar received the delegation most graciously and carefully examined with them on the map the frontiers of the future Czecho-Slovak State as they would like to have them.

After that the Czechs asked the Supreme Commander's Chief of Staff to form special Czech regiments which were to consist not only of Russian Czechs, but also of Czech and Slovak prisoners, who from the very beginning of the war had surrendered to the Russian Army in crowds. This suggestion gave rise to many misunderstandings, all the more regrettable because the enemies of the Russian Government, both in Russia and in Czecho-Slovakia, used them as a proof of our hostility and deception towards the Czechs. After what I have said already, it is hardly necessary to repeat that neither the Russian Government nor the Russian people felt the slightest hostility for the Czechs. A short and simple argument is sufficient to prove this. To say nothing of the blood relationship of which the Russian people were deeply conscious, Russia realized that the Austro-Hungarian Slavs were most valuable allies for her in the struggle with Germanism as represented by the Hohenzollern and the Hapsburg Empires.

There was no sense and no profit in repulsing such allies. I often had to defend the interests of the Slavs – Serbian and Czecho-Slovakian – against the French, who had a tendency to seek support in Austria against Germany and to draw Austria within the influence of the Triple Entente by making concessions to her at the expense of the Slav people. Such tendencies were strongly marked in certain circles in France. There is hardly any need to explain how mistaken such calculations were, to say nothing of the dangerous effect they might have on our alliance. Fortunately the firm hand of Delcassé put an end to all this.

The delay in recognizing the Czech regiments as a national army was due not to the Russian Government's hostility to the Czechs, or a wish to hinder the restoration of their country, but to the simple reason that the masses of Austrian Slavs who surrendered, or were taken, prisoners of war might include many elements that were Slav in name only; at a time so critical for Russia she could not be careful enough about the foreigners whom she allowed to fight for her side by side with her own armies. Our military authorities were apprehensive not of the Slavs, who could do no harm to Russia, but of those who merely masqueraded as Slavs and were, in truth, Russia's enemies.

Unfortunately these misunderstandings have not been completely cleared to this day,[1] as I have discovered during the

[1] One of the chief reproaches levelled against the Tsarist Russia by the Czech Intelligentsia hostile to it is that the Imperial Government had no definitely worked-out plan of re-creating the Czech State. But surely Russia could not be expected to produce such a plan, and it was wise on her part not to interfere with the task that so intimately concerned the inner national life of the Czech people and, as every one thought, could be solved by them alone. This seems all the more obvious since in the opinion of many Czechs the work of political regeneration of their country has not been done quite satisfactorily so far as certain sections of the population are concerned. It is not likely that the participation of the Russian Government would have ensured a better result, for, in spite of its genuine friendship for the Czechs, it knew little about the desires and the needs of the population. It seems to me, therefore, that Russia was right in adopting the attitude she did. The Russian Government had decided to confine itself to energetically supporting the aspirations of the Czech people and safeguarding their interests as defined by the Czechs themselves, against any outside interference hostile to their national aims.

year I spent in Prague. There still are people in Czecho-Slovakia who contend that monarchical Russia had done nothing for the restoration of their country and, indeed, had hindered it. There can, unhappily, be no doubt that owing to the anti-national revolution, which has paralysed her for many years to come, Russia had to leave unfinished this task so near to her heart, just as she left many other tasks connected with the Great War; but there is not a shadow of ground for supposing that she failed to sympathize, or actually hindered, the realization of the Czechs' glorious dream of attaining political liberty. This allegation is most likely due to party passions or mistaken political calculations, or both. I have not sufficient facts at my disposal to decide what the reason is, and leave to the future historian to deal with this question as well as with several other points which arose after the downfall of the Russian Monarchy and have not been cleared up yet. For the present let us retain our old friendly feelings towards the Czecho-Slovaks, gratefully remembering all they have done in these hard times for the Russian students and refugees, who have been deprived through unheard-of persecutions of man's holiest and most precious possession on earth – their native land.

CHAPTER XII

The second anniversary of the war, in July, 1916, coincided with my leaving the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

From the moment that Goremykin was appointed President of the Council of Ministers, to be replaced later on by Stürmer, the central power in the Empire sunk lower and lower until, eventually, it landed in an abyss. The Government grew more disunited every day and its position became more and more uncertain. I have described the first of these grave-diggers of the Russian State – unfortunately, he was followed by many others – as a man who had outlived himself and lost the power of understanding the affairs of the State. He was obviously unfit for his post and yet he had support both at Court, where Rasputin's friends had succeeded in winning for him the Empress Alexandra Feodorovna's favour, and among members of the Government, with some of whom he had been connected during his former term of office. His supporters in the Council of Ministers were not many and not all of them remained faithful to him to the end. The Minister of Agriculture, Krivosheyin, to whom Goremykin owed his appointment as President of the Council, parted ways with him as soon as he realized his unfitness for the post. Relations between the Government and the Duma became dangerously strained owing to Goremykin's reluctance and incapacity to co-operate with it. In 1906 Goremykin dissolved the first Duma that was politically immature and too revolutionary to answer the needs of the critical moment in which the Tsar called it together as the first institution of a parliamentary type in Russia; and he transferred his dislike and distrust to the third Duma, although it in no way deserved them. Its composition and the moderate views of most of its members made it the very kind of representative body which a reasonable central Power required when Russia was taking her first steps on the way to political liberty, after an unsuccessful war and serious political troubles. After the dissolution of the first Duma and of the second one, which proved to be no better, Goremykin was replaced by Stolypin, who was compelled by the force of events to adopt an unconstitutional procedure for passing an electoral reform. Shaken by the catastrophe in the Far East

and by the revolutionary outburst that had been difficult to subdue, Russia stood in urgent need of internal peace and quiet legislative work, which alone could bring about the long-needed political and economic reforms. The experience of the first two Dumas gave little hope of this; elected according to the original suffrage law they were not free from the revolutionary ferment, and, instead of doing systematic practical work, directed all their energies to fighting the Government. Fortunately for Russia governmental power was in the firm hands of Stolypin, who thought of nothing but his country's interests and had no aim other than its welfare. Young, fearless and unselfish, he did not hesitate to trample on the letter of the law in order to save its spirit. Without the help of the national representatives he created a suffrage law which made it difficult for the destructive elements to enter the Duma and thus made its further existence possible, enabling it to do useful work for the political reconstruction of Russia. He would not have achieved this object had he followed the legal course. The Duma would never have consented to lay hands on itself for the sake of civic order, hateful to the extremists, since it diminished the chances of a social revolution upon which all their hopes were based. These extremists in the Duma were the vanguard of the Bolshevik menace, staved off by Stolypin's suffrage law and other measures the chief of which was his famous land reform. The latter healed the old sore in the social life of Russia, giving the peasantry every chance to satisfy their urgent economic and cultural needs. At the same time it prejudiced the socialist agitation among the peasants who had long been expecting a reform which would give them freehold landed property.

To say nothing of Stolypin's other plans and achievements, this reform alone is sufficient to rank him among the greatest statesmen of Russia. The revolutionaries who assassinated him estimated the importance of his work more correctly than the men of order, some of whom fail to this day to recognize it. A crime that served its purpose better than did the assassination of Stolypin has never been known in Russian history. It is usually said that no man is irreplaceable. This may be so when the political life of a country runs smoothly, but at times of acute political crisis the case is certainly different. Stolypin

was the only man in Russia capable of successfully fighting the Revolution and of being victorious over it. No other man could be found to take his place; the helpless distraction of those in power and the connivance of others enabled the revolutionaries to do their mad and bloody work and to root out, together with the weeds, a most promising crop of wheat.

The dismissal of Kokovtsov, who replaced Stolypin at the head of the Government, led to very serious results. Kokovtsov had a number of enemies, for, with all his fine qualities as a statesman, he was a man lacking in subtlety and accustomed through his long experience as a bureaucratic official to act according to his own ideas without taking into consideration the opinion of his opponents. These failings had an immediate effect upon his relations with the Duma. Being a young institution it had an exaggerated idea of its own importance, and Kokovtsov did not always know how to spare its vanity. He had no supporters at Court, although the Tsar recognized his merit. His extreme dislike of Rasputin set the Empress against him, for she had grown accustomed of late years to show favour only to persons who were friendly to Rasputin and his clique. Under these circumstances, the efforts of one or two influential members of the Council hostile to Kokovtsov were sufficient to make it impossible for him to remain at the helm of government. Early in 1914 he was dismissed and Goremykin was put in his place. The chair vacated by Kokovtsov, who was a splendid worker and excellently informed on questions of home administration, was now occupied by a decrepit old man, only half alive. The Empress was not directly responsible for Goremykin's appointment, but she was pleased about it since Rasputin liked him, and during the two years he was in power he enjoyed the Empress's favour and support. The appointment, as I have already said, was the doing of Krivosheyin, the Minister of Agriculture and Kokovtsov's old enemy, who had not the courage himself to take at so difficult a moment the most responsible post in the Empire, in spite of the Tsar's wish that he should do so.

I will not dwell upon the history of M. Goremykin's administration and will only touch upon it in so far as it has affected the fate of the Ministers' Council and my own.

Goremykin's rise to power immediately made itself felt in

the Council and outside of it. There arose dissensions among the Ministers, hindering the business of the State. Two groups, or rather two camps, were formed, one for and the other against him. The first – such is human weakness! – was larger than the second, at any rate until the time when Goremykin's incompetence became obvious to the country as a whole. His supporters included the Right Wing of the Council and were headed by the Minister of Justice, Shtcheglovitov, a clever man and a learned lawyer newly converted to Conservative ideas from the ranks of the Opposition, and zealous as all neophytes are. Goremykin's supporters had been more or less secretly opposed to Stolypin's policy and acquiesced only in such reforms, if any, as did not affect the important parts of the machinery of the State, however worn out they might be. They found it no less difficult than Goremykin to reconcile themselves to the existence of the Duma, and still more to establish the necessary *modus vivendi* with it. I think it would not be a mistake to say that some of them were secret followers of Rasputin.

The second group of Ministers, quite undeservedly named the Radical group, consisted of men who were as genuine monarchists as their colleagues on the Right, but who understood that no institution, however reasonable in principle, could claim to remain unchangeable. The essence of their political wisdom might be expressed by the philosophical dictum – one of the few that have never been disproved – that only that which is capable of transformation can endure. They also believed that all the sound and vital elements in the civil and political life of the country should be carefully guarded, and that no reform, designed to meet the requirements of the time, should lead to a sudden breach between the past and the present, but should be introduced gradually so as to be understood by the people and not have the character of a dangerous experiment. For the Anglo-Saxon peoples all this is an indisputable truth established by the experience of centuries, but nations that are politically younger seldom take it into consideration. In Russia contempt of this truth has brought the country to the verge of ruin, and it disturbed as well the life of many other nations whose future may be seriously affected.

Such were the views that have given ground to the Russian reactionaries for accusing their opponents of Radicalism. This accusation has always appeared to me absurd, and now, after the awful catastrophe that has overtaken Russia, it seems simply incredible.

As we watched the course of events and the attitude of the Council of Ministers which was the chief organ of central power in the Empire, we came to the conclusion that if no limit were put to the reactionary policy of the Government, it would soon be overtaken by a final catastrophe.

The vital forces of the country were consumed by a fruitless struggle with the revolutionary movement, encouraged by the fact that after the assassination of Stolypin no statesman had been able to cope with it. Just and legitimate as this struggle was, the Government conducted it in a manner which in many cases alienated public sympathy. At every step it made mistakes in tactics and was so unpopular that even the moderate sections of Russian society blamed it for its blunders, to say nothing of the crowds of those whose sole aim was to discredit the Government. There was no live bond between the Council of Ministers and the Duma, although individual Ministers tried to create it by their conciliatory methods and deserved, in consequence, the confidence of the Duma. I know from personal experience that it was not at all difficult to establish the necessary co-operation with the last Duma. It was on the whole patriotically minded and the extremists played a secondary part in it. It was quite possible jointly with it to carry on constructive work for the benefit of the country. It was only necessary to forget a few things and to learn a few others – which was all the easier since the Duma asked little, having gained wisdom from the example of its predecessors, who wanted not only to legislate but to rule as well. The third Duma learned to understand correctly its tasks and to do its work within the limits prescribed by law. It was possible to hope that internal peace might be restored. But this could only happen on condition that the Government behaved differently, and so long as the power was in the hands of Goremykin and his friends, upon whom he helplessly relied, letting them do all the work of administration, there could be no hope of any improvement in the situation. Improvement

would only have been possible if Goremykin had been deprived of these props, and finding himself alone among men of sound judgment, had either fallen under their influence or resigned his post. But there was little chance of this.

I formed these conclusions soon after Goremykin was appointed President of the Council. I realized more clearly every day that it was essential to rouse the Government from the reactionary slumber into which it was plunged by Goremykin's refusal to pursue the salutary course indicated by Stolypin. I kept thinking of Goethe's line about 'rights and laws going on like a chronic disease' [1] as an excellent description of the situation in Russia. The position seemed to me all the more terrible that I was convinced at the time, and am convinced now, that it was quite possible to avert the approaching catastrophe. The Government had all the means for it: an army that had not yet been infected with the revolutionary leprosy, finance left by Kokovtsov in an admirable state, a system of administration that had proved its fitness to combat the Revolution, and a Duma that was for the most part patriotic. There was every chance of salvation. Another favourable circumstance, the importance of which cannot be over-estimated, was that the Russian people have never been politically ambitious and merely desired a satisfactory arrangement with regard to land, something like that which Stolypin had in view, and liberation from a peculiar and archaic system of administrative tutelage. This fact confirms my conviction that before the war Russia might very well have adopted the reasonable course of peacefully developing the spiritual resources of her people and exploiting in a proper fashion her natural wealth. I am certain that the welfare of Russia was hindered by the Government, which consisted of men worshipping antiquated ideals and unable to read the signs of the times.

What I have said here is enough to indicate the position which I took up in the Council of Ministers and outside of it soon after the reappearance of Goremykin in the political arena. As Minister of Foreign Affairs I had no direct part in framing Government measures concerned with internal administration, and therefore had no chance of influencing the

[1] *Es schleppen sich Gesetz und Rechte wie eine alte Krankheit fort.*

administrative policy of the Government. I learned what had been done only after the measures proposed had been put into shape by the departments concerned, and I could do no more than express my disagreement on paper. As a rule the majority of my colleagues in the Council were against me, and there was no point in using this platonic form of opposition frequently. So I generally reserved my objections for cases in which I could not agree with the decisions of the majority as a matter of principle, or when they might affect directly or indirectly the external position of the Empire.

Goremykin and his supporters immediately spotted me as an enemy and started a campaign against me, which led to my resignation in July, 1916. For my part, I did not remain idle. I grew more convinced every day that the Government could not gain the country's confidence, essential to its successful work, until Goremykin was deprived of power, together with his reactionary supporters, the most dangerous of whom, because the most gifted, was the Minister of Justice, Shtcheglovitov. It was clear to me that alone I could achieve nothing, and so I decided to tell quite frankly the Ministers who shared my views how dangerous, in my opinion, was the alienation between the Government and the national representatives in the Duma, who were reasonable and not exacting and had influence with all well-meaning Russians. I proposed to explain the danger to the Tsar and do our best to eliminate it.

I talked first to my colleague and neighbour, M. Bark, who lived in the same buildings. We were quite unanimous about the matter. As he was a friend of Krivosheyin, the Minister of Agriculture, I asked him to tell Krivosheyin about our conversation and to canvass him for our cause. Then I went to see the State Controller, M. Haritonov, one of the most prominent members of the Council, and secured his help. A few days after I took the first step, an agreement was reached between the Ministers who were opposed to the policy of their president. By common consent we decided that the following Ministers should be dismissed from office: the Minister of Justice, Shtcheglovitov; Procurator of the Holy Synod, Sabler; Minister of Internal Affairs, Maklakov; and Minister of War, Sukhomlinov. The first three were extreme reaction-

aries and were deservedly unpopular with the Duma and the general public. Sukhomlinov was equally unpopular, not on the ground of his political convictions, for he had none, but because of his extraordinary thoughtlessness and a complete absence of the qualities necessary to a Minister of War at a time of dangerous international conflict.

As to the head of the Government, my colleagues and I came to the conclusion that to ask the Tsar to dismiss him, too, would be very difficult and might prevent the success of our plan. I have already said that Goremykin had the powerful protection of the Empress Alexandra Feodorovna and, under the circumstances, it would have been hard to obtain his dismissal. And besides, we thought that without Shtcheglovitov, who was the soul and the brain of the reactionary party, and without his other supporters, Goremykin's part in the Government would be insignificant.

It was arranged that any one of us should take the first opportunity to inform the Tsar of the true state of things in the Empire, of the growing unpopularity of the Government with the Duma and the general public, and of the danger which distrust of the Government might bring to Russia at a time when she was going through a terrible war and struggling with internal unrest.

Before we decided to take concerted action in order to avert the dangers created by incompetent administration, I made several efforts in that direction by myself. I considered it my duty to tell the Tsar of my anxiety for the future of Russia and of the Russian monarchy which have always – and now, after the experience of a proletarian republic, more than ever – appeared to me to be one and indivisible. I am somewhat reluctant to speak of my attempts, for fear I may be suspected of attaching to them an importance which, in truth, they did not possess, since they ended in a complete failure. My insistence was interpreted by the Empress, or rather by those whose obedient tool she unconsciously was, as a desire to direct the home policy of the Empire. Strange as this suspicion was, it may have left an impression upon the mind of the Tsar. I began to notice in him a certain reserve which prevented me from speaking to him with perfect frankness as I had done, with his consent, from the very first day of assuming office.

During the first five years the Tsar gave me constant proofs of his complete confidence in me. In that time I had grown accustomed to regard this confidence as my due, and only feared to lose it through some fault of my own. The possibility of losing it through somebody else's fault did not trouble me much even when the former friendliness of the Empress for me passed into open disfavour because of my hostility to the Rasputin clique.

When I raised the question of clearing the Council of Ministers of the obnoxious reactionary elements, the Tsar had not yet expressed any distrust of me and I could still speak to him freely. In making my reports to him I had constantly to touch, in connection with foreign politics, upon the internal condition of Russia which was getting more and more acute under the influence of revolutionary propaganda. As always happens in times of crisis, the questions of internal and external politics got so intertwined that it was almost impossible to disentangle them. The problems of foreign policy, difficult and numerous as they were, caused me less anxiety than those of the home policy. Though our military operations were rather slow and not always successful, Russia was not menaced on that score with any serious danger. Relations with our Allies were quite satisfactory and there was no reason to fear their growing worse. But the internal position of the Empire caused grave anxiety to every one capable of seeing and understanding what was happening. There were many such people, and the apprehensions freely expressed by all classes had become alarming. The Ministry of War acquired new enemies every day, who insisted that decisive measures should be taken to remedy its defects.

The bad organization of the rear was painfully felt by the country as a whole. The Minister of War, who had never enjoyed public confidence, had terrible accusations levelled against him, including that of treason. I had an intimate knowledge of General Sukhomlinov's character and was convinced that these accusations were groundless, as indeed was proved later at the trial. Nevertheless, even before the war I felt certain that he was utterly unsuitable for the post he occupied. In spite of his mature age Sukhomlinov was thoughtless and eager for pleasure like a youth. He enjoyed life

and disliked work. His being at the head of the Ministry of War was a regular calamity, and the abuses of which his underlings, if not he himself, were guilty, discredited the Government. It was very difficult to make him work, but to get him to speak the truth was well-nigh impossible.

At the beginning of 1915 I told the Tsar rather fully what harm General Sukhomlinov's inactivity was causing. I had hoped that the frankly expressed opinion of a person who had nothing to do with the Ministry of War and had no personal grudge against Sukhomlinov, would induce His Majesty to place less confidence in the unjustifiable optimism that characterized the War Minister's reports, often based on false data. My attempt was unsuccessful and I made a rather unfavourable impression on the Tsar, but I returned to the subject at the first opportunity under the influence of what I had heard from members of the Duma, who told me of the growing indignation of the Duma Committees against Sukhomlinov. This time the Tsar, who liked Sukhomlinov's optimism, said in answer that he had known all along the General had many enemies, especially at the Headquarters, but that he would regard all accusations against Sukhomlinov as unproven until confronted with a proof 'in black and white.' I expressed my regret at not being able to produce such proofs, adding that I thought it was unnecessary since they were only too easy to obtain in a different but no less convincing form if only one wished to do so. I left Tsarskoié-Sélo in a troubled frame of mind and did not resume the subject for some time, sincerely hoping that chance would supply me with some incontrovertible proof of what I had said to the Tsar about Sukhomlinov. My hopes came true sooner than I had expected. Soon after the beginning of the war the French Ambassador, in conversation with me, touched upon the question of our munition supplies. He knew that this very sore question gave much concern both to the Duma Committees and to the Government, which had a poor opinion of the War Minister. The French Government, too, were very interested in our armaments, suspecting that their state left much to be desired. Speaking of his apprehensions the French Ambassador told me that, at the request of the French War Office, he had written to General Sukhomlinov telling him that France wanted to come

to our aid and to make good our shortage of munitions. In answer to this offer Sukhomlinov sent the French Ambassador a letter saying that Russia did not need anything and was amply provided with munitions for a long time to come. Paléologue brought the letter with him and showed it to me as a confirmation of his words. As I read the letter I recalled the Tsar's words about a proof in 'black and white' of Sukhomlinov's unconscientiousness, and asked the Ambassador to lend me this document to show to His Majesty, promising to return it when I had done with it. Paléologue gave me the letter and I put it together with the papers which I took to Tsarskoié-Sélo when I went there with my next report.

When I had finished with the affairs for the day I reminded the Tsar of his words and, handing him Sukhomlinov's letter, expressed a hope that he would find it sufficiently convincing. I saw from the Tsar's face as he read the letter what a painful and unexpected impression it produced upon him. When he had finished he merely said that he would keep the letter and return it to me presently. Seeing how pained and surprised the Tsar was I felt certain that the letter would have the desired effect and returned no more to the subject of Sukhomlinov, awaiting further developments. A few days later the Tsar sent the letter back to me without any comment. Soon after this Sukhomlinov was dismissed and General Polivanov appointed in his place.

Sukhomlinov's retirement and the appointment of Polivanov were equally well received by the general public and the Duma with which Polivanov was highly popular. The Council of Ministers also welcomed him.

The new Minister of War was a very intelligent man and an indefatigable worker. He had very much resented having to serve under such a chief as Sukhomlinov. Ambitious and well aware of his own worth he waited impatiently for an opportunity to come to the fore and occupy a place worthy of him. He was a Liberal, but being much too intelligent to dream of a republican or a parliamentary régime in Russia, remained a monarchist. His sarcastic judgments about people and events created him many enemies, who paid him out for his contempt of them by spreading rumours that he was a republican bent on making a career at all costs. These rumours, confirmed by

his friendship with persons who had the reputation of being politically unsound, soon reached Tsarskoié-Sélo, where he was treated with an exaggerated suspicion which embittered him all the more. Polivanov realized that his appointment to the post of Minister of War was due to the force of circumstances and not to the Tsar's confidence in him, and he did not possess sufficient tact and self-control to improve his position.

I liked Polivanov for his fine qualities and felt convinced that at so trying a time he could be of great service in his new post, and so I pointed out to him in a friendly way that he ought to sacrifice his vanity and make every effort to win the Tsar's confidence in order to ensure the success of his work. He quite saw that I was right, but did not know how to put his relations with the Tsar on a new basis and to break with the friends who compromised him. Everything remained as before, and so far from establishing a closer relationship with the Tsar, Polivanov drifted further away; in a year's time he was dismissed from his post and replaced by a more compliant, but a less gifted, man. The failure of his career was the cause of Polivanov's ruin; morbidly sensitive he lost his spiritual balance, forgot his duty as a citizen and ended with an inglorious death.

The dismissal of Sukhomlinov was not sufficient to clear the Council of Ministers from undesirable elements. He had proved incompetent to deal with the new and urgent demands brought about by the war and it was inevitable that he should leave his post. It was equally necessary, though not perhaps so obvious, that other highly unpopular ministers should resign, too. Our efforts in this direction proved to be fairly successful. In my reports to the Tsar I constantly reverted to the necessity of replacing Sabler and Maklakov by persons more likely to inspire public confidence, and I became convinced that His Majesty would part with them without regret. When later on I spoke of the dangerous part played by the Minister of Justice, Shtcheglovitov, the most, if not the only, gifted member of the extreme Right Wing of the Council, the Tsar was surprised at my ascribing to Shtcheglovitov so great an influence upon the affairs of the State and asked me what grounds I had for thinking so. I answered that it was sufficient to be present at a single meeting of the Ministers' Council in

order to have no doubts left on that score. Shtcheglovitov spoke little and cautiously, but owing to his intelligence and special knowledge the other members of his party, who possessed neither of these advantages, followed his lead both in the Council of Ministers and in the Upper House, even before he had been appointed its Chairman.

There was only one other reactionary statesman who was Shtcheglovitov's equal, both in talent and the influence he had with his party – the former Minister of Internal Affairs, Durnovo, who had come to grief over an incident of a romantic nature, through allowing the voice of passion to drown the voice of reason. Durnovo was by nature more gifted than Shtcheglovitov; he might well be compared to a nugget of gold. With the education of a navigating officer and little general culture, Durnovo climbed to the highest offices in the State owing to his clear intellect and strong will, but he never succeeded in getting rid of the mental outlook of a police official. One cannot help comparing him with Count Witte. As far as the lack of culture and education is concerned they were both on about the same level; in practical sense and strength of character Durnovo was, I think, superior to Witte. Both had to do with the Revolution. Durnovo attacked it boldly and fought it successfully; Witte, a man of double thoughts, capitulated before it. Fortunately for Russia, Stolypin appeared and gave the country a ten-years' rest. But his successors did not develop the results achieved by him in the course of those lucky years.

The Tsar sacrificed Shtcheglovitov, as well as Sabler and Maklakov, in spite of the fact that Shtcheglovitov had the sympathies of Rasputin and was strongly supported by the extreme Right. These changes in the Government coincided with the arrival at the Grand Duke Nicholas's headquarters, where the Tsar was at the moment, of the members of the Council of Ministers. When we came to Baranovichi we heard that the Grand Duke had been largely responsible for the Tsar's decision to dismiss the four undesirable Ministers and we were sincerely grateful to him for his help. Their successors, A. I. Hvostov, Prince Shtcherbatov, General Polivanov and A. D. Samarin, arrived at the same time as we did and received a warm welcome from us. Goremykin still remained at

the head of the Government, weakened by the loss of his chief supporters, but dangerous because of his hopeless laziness and cynical indifference. Subsequent months were taken up with fighting him until, at last, the Tsar had to yield to necessity and to dismiss him, in spite of the energetic protests of the Empress. The dark forces surrounded her closer and closer and she fell more and more under their evil influence. Goremykin's resignation made her angry with the Ministers whom she thought responsible for it, including myself. After that I had to cause her, though entirely against my will, a number of annoyances and she showed an increasing dislike for me.

Having lost the support of his friends Goremykin doggedly continued to oppose his progressive colleagues in the Council, both old and new. He had practically all the Ministers against him, except the Minister of Justice, A. I. Hvostov, who was an old friend of his, but in spite of this he behaved with an obstinacy remarkable in a man of his age and absolutely fatal to the constructive work of the Government. The atmosphere of the Ministers' Council soon became unbearable, and had we not realized the danger of an open rupture at so critical a time there would certainly have been one. It proved impossible, however, to conceal from the public the dissensions among the Government, and the prestige of the central power rapidly declined. The Duma and even the Council of State – the stronghold of Russian Conservatism – began to distrust the Government and to resent its incompetence and inactivity. The Press and the public organizations, which during the war acquired an independence and importance they never had before, took up an attitude that precluded just and reasonable criticism and often assumed a revolutionary character. Though the latter were financed by the Treasury, for they had no means of their own, most of these organizations forgot that they were created for the purpose of helping the Government. As to the Press, it was not only the Left Wing of it that attacked the Government; some of the Conservative papers were just as bad. Governmental power was divided between innumerable military and civil bodies and there was no one to put an end to the anarchy which continued unchecked, exciting people's minds and shattering the very principle of authority.

The Tsar's sudden decision to remove the Grand Duke

Nicholas from the Supreme Command and to take his place at the head of the Army, caused a great outburst of public anxiety.

At the very beginning of the war the Tsar had declared to the Ministers' Council his intention of personally leading the Russian troops, and we had the greatest difficulty in persuading him to give up the idea and to appoint to the post of Commander-in-Chief the Grand Duke Nicholas. He was more closely connected with the Army than any other member of the Imperial family and was very popular with it, partly because of the popularity enjoyed by his father, who had been Commander-in-Chief during the Balkan War of 1876–7.

The Emperor's desire to lead the Russian Army into battle was inspired by a noble impulse. According to the Constitution, he was the supreme leader of all the armed forces of the Empire. I understand to some extent his wish to give a real meaning to this abstract title. I had often heard him say that the Russian Tsar should be where the fate of Russia was being decided. This was an indisputable truth at the time of Peter the Great, but in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries the methods of waging war had completely changed and the Army now meant the nation in arms; the conception of the Supreme Leader lost its original meaning and acquired rather a juridical significance indicating one of the prerogatives of the Sovereign in virtue of which the whole organization of the military forces of the Empire directly depended upon his will.

After the failures of the summer campaign of 1915, the question of High Command came up once more and the Tsar expressed his determination to take the duties of Commander-in-Chief upon himself. The Council of Ministers shared the general anxiety for the consequences of this decision, and did its utmost to open his Majesty's eyes to the dangers which such a step involved for the country and for him personally. At the meeting of the Council, presided over by the Tsar, on August 20, 1915, every one of us in turn expressed our opposition to his intention. To the honour of my colleagues I must say that not one of them swerved from truth. All spoke quite freely, though some more strongly than others, pointing out to the Tsar the drawbacks of his plan. Even Goremykin expressed his fear of the risks involved in the Tsar's appearing

at the front in the active part of a Commander-in-Chief. When my turn came I said that the functions of the Supreme Leader of all the armed forces of the Empire were much wider than the duties of Commander-in-Chief, for they included the administration, not only of the front, but also of the rear, which the Commander-in-Chief was unable to supervise – to say nothing of the fact that they embraced the whole system of national defences, including the naval forces. I added that if these duties were carried out by the same person, one of them might be overlooked to the detriment of another, and that the aim should be not to neglect the rear at the expense of the front, or vice versa, but to look after both, which was only possible if the work were not in the hands of one man. I thought that for the reasons indicated the Supreme Leader of the military forces of the Empire ought to remain at the centre of administration and not to forsake it at so critical a moment.

In my *tête-à-tête* conversations with the Tsar during my reports to him, I more than once tried to persuade him that his leaving the capital would be highly dangerous and would increase public anxiety and revolutionary ferment. I begged him not to lose sight of the fact that his place could not remain empty and that it would inevitably be occupied by persons not entitled to it, which would make the situation at home still more complex and confused and give an opportunity for many abuses to be done under the cover of his name. I did not dot the i's and mentioned no names, and, indeed, there was no need to do so. The Tsar easily grasped the unsaid meaning and I saw how distasteful my words were to him. It was painful to me to refer to the dangerous part that the Empress had begun to play since Rasputin gained possession of her will and intellect. The Tsar did not contradict me, but as I spoke he seemed to recede further away from me, so that at last I felt that a deep gulf lay between us. I understood that I lost his favour because I trespassed on the forbidden ground of his inner life where a stranger was never allowed to enter. As I have said, the Tsar had the faculty of guessing the meaning of what had remained unsaid; but he had not the faculty of reading the hearts of men and estimating the sincerity of their motives.

The Council of Ministers, with the exception of its President, who looked upon everything as trifles not worth troubling about, were clearly aware what the outcome of the increasing decay of authority was likely to be and insisted upon Goremykin telling the Tsar the whole truth and taking energetic measures to put down social unrest. The Council thought that the first step in that direction should be to form a Government enjoying the confidence of the national representatives and capable of establishing the necessary co-operation with the Duma, about which Goremykin cared so little. We thought that the best way to bring this about would be to make a collective appeal to the Tsar, for we had lost faith in the efficacy of individual appeals which most of us had made to him, without any success, owing to the opposition of Goremykin and his friends. At the secret sittings of the Council we – and I, perhaps, oftener and more frankly than others, except the Procurator of the Holy Synod, A. D. Samarin, an ardent patriot and a convinced monarchist – constantly returned to the question of putting into power a Government worthy of public confidence, letting Goremykin understand that in such a Government there would be no place for him. Deeply selfish but intelligent by nature he had understood long ago that he was in our eyes the chief obstacle in the way of a new Government policy, which, as every one must have seen, was urgently demanded by the interests of Russia during the world crisis of 1914. In answer to our entreaties, Goremykin used to say, 'Ask the Emperor to dismiss me. This would be doing me a service,' but he refused point-blank to pass on to the Tsar our collective demand for a change of Government under the pretext that the appointment of Ministers is a prerogative of the Crown and must not be done under pressure from outside. Such obedience to the letter of the law during the troubled time when Russia was struggling both with an external enemy and with an insurgent revolution, threatened the very existence of the country. Despairing of getting anything done in the legal way, the Ministers told Goremykin they would hand their statement to the Tsar direct.

By that time I was on such terms with Goremykin that hardly one meeting of the Council passed without a sharp encounter between us and the remembrance of this is still

painful to me. Our decision had the effect of cooling the heated atmosphere of the meetings.

On August 21 all the Ministers assembled at my house with the exception of the Naval and War Ministers, whose position did not allow them to take part in such steps; they expressed, however, their sympathy with our action. At our common request the Procurator of the Synod, Samarin, composed the letter to the Tsar. Here is the text of the document, which caused a great stir at the time although it did not appear in print till quite recently, in the memoirs of General Polivanov published after his death.

'Most gracious Sovereign, do not find fault with us for appealing to you boldly and frankly. Our action is dictated by loyalty and love for you and our country and by our anxious recognition of the menacing character of what is happening around us. Yesterday at the meeting of the Council, at which you presided, we unanimously begged you not to remove Grand Duke Nicholas from the High Command of the Army. We fear that Your Majesty was not willing to grant our prayer, which is, we think, the prayer of all loyal Russians. We venture once more to tell you that to the best of our judgment your decision threatens with serious consequences Russia, your dynasty and your person. At the same meeting you could see for yourself the irreconcilable difference between our Chairman and us in our estimate of the situation in the country and of the policy to be pursued by the Government. Such a state of things is inadmissible at all times and at the present moment it is fatal. Under such conditions we do not believe we can be of real service to Your Majesty and to our country.

P. Haritonov, A. Krivosheyin, S. Sazonov,
P. Bark, Prince N. Shtcherbatov, A. Samarin,
Count P. Ignatyev, Prince V. Shahovskoy.'

When, after signing this letter, the Ministers left me to go home they saw at the front door a police officer who, in answer to their question, said that he was on duty because there was a meeting of the Ministers' Council. Obviously my house was carefully watched, and the presence of seven Ministers there was immediately reported to the police.

Our meeting did not remain a secret, and the following day the *Retch* and the *Kolokol* – papers of entirely different political character – reported a rumour that three candidates for the post of the President of the Ministers' Council had been suggested: Krivosheyin, Polivanov and myself. I do not know whether there was any truth in this so far as the first two were concerned, but certainly no one had ever proposed me as a candidate and I never thought of it myself. Nevertheless, this rumour was taken into account in the Palace at Tsarskoié-Sélo and I sank lower than ever in the Empress's favour.

The day after we signed our collective resignation there was a meeting at the Winter Palace of the special Council for Defence, in which all the members of the Government and representatives of the Council of State and the Duma took part and the Tsar presided. I took advantage of this opportunity and gave our letter to the Lord Chamberlain, Count Benckendorff, for His Majesty. The letter reached its destination that very evening. It decided the fate of the Ministers who signed it: six of them, including myself, were gradually got rid of during the following year, and only two, supposed to be less dangerous, remained in office till the downfall of the monarchy.

Our collective appeal to the Tsar thus ended in failure exactly as our individual attempts to bring him to our point of view had done. The Tsar was extremely displeased at our action which he compared to a strike. Goremykin was asked to express to us his displeasure; our resignation was not accepted by His Majesty and we were all ordered to remain at our posts. We had done our duty but we did not have the good fortune of doing a service to our Sovereign and country at the critical moment.

It was not from any personal feeling of irritation against the Grand Duke Nicholas that the Tsar removed him from the High Command, appointing him to be the Viceroy of the Caucasus and Commander-in-Chief of the Caucasian Army. Unconsciously the Tsar acted under the influence of the Empress, who was led by Rasputin and his clique to suspect the Grand Duke of ambitious designs, utterly foreign to him, and of actually aspiring to the Crown. The Grand Duke was blamed for the disasters at the Front which were due to our

lack of munitions and the incapacity of the chief of his staff, General Yanushkevich. Besides, there prevailed at the Palace a mystical conviction that the appearance of the Tsar at the head of the Army would alone change the position at the Front. The part of prophetess was played by Madame Vyrubova, an ambitious, but by no means intelligent woman, who combined with a slavish obedience to Rasputin an ecstatic devotion to the Empress and to the Tsar to which he did not respond in the slightest.

I have no doubt that the Empress sincerely believed that the terrible accusations against the Grand Duke Nicholas, suggested to her by neurasthenics and intriguing adventurers, were true, although, as a matter of fact, he was more devoted to the Tsar than any other member of the Imperial family. Some people thought that the Empress insisted on the Tsar's going to the Front in order that she might fulfil her ambitious dream of ruling the country in his absence. I am inclined to think that her insistence was due to her morbid condition and that she was merely the tool of the unscrupulous people behind her. As to the latter I am convinced that they set up this intrigue for the sake of utilizing for their own selfish ends the situation that would thus be created. When the Emperor left the capital and the Empress remained the central figure there, a happy time came for them of endless intrigues, solicitations and subterfuges. The Tsar's Headquarters at Mohilyov were simply snowed under with all kinds of petitions and appeals which generally passed through the Empress's hands and were, as a rule, granted at once. Since the beginning of the war the Emperor Nicholas was more and more dominated by his wife, and now that he had taken upon himself the burden of the supreme command he found it more difficult than ever to refuse her anything. He lived in a military environment, was entirely absorbed by his responsible task and did not have near him the influences which sometimes enabled him in the past to withstand the claims of the Empress. He had never cared for Government squabbles, and now it was almost impossible for him to discover the rights and wrongs of them.

The Tsar's removal to Mohilyov was followed by the gradual decay of Government and by appointments to the chief posts

in the Empire of men so incredibly unsuited that the public opinion grew exasperated. They discredited the principle of Monarchy in the eyes of the Russian people and brought about the downfall of the dynasty to which Russia owed her greatness and glory.

The resignation of Goremykin might have been a happy day for Russia had it meant a change in Home Politics. But Goremykin was replaced by Stürmer, a protégé of Rasputin, and Russia gained nothing by the exchange.

CHAPTER XIII

From the time of the Vienna Congress the Polish policy of Russia was fatally affected by the annexation, badly conceived and unsuccessfully carried out, of that part of Polish territory which has been called by us the Kingdom of Poland.

I am not able here to consider the considerations which induced the Emperor Alexander I to commit the disastrous mistake of annexing Poland, and I could not, in any case, regard them as valid. I can only explain the Emperor's action by his lack of national feeling, which was indeed the essential defect of all his contemporaries. At rare and exceptional moments of his life such as 1812, national feeling asserted itself strongly in him, but soon gave way to a vague world-sorrow which drove him to seek consolation in the mystic circle of Baroness Krüdener or in the company of Araktcheyev, the creator of 'military settlements.'

The annexation of Poland, not being dictated by the needs of self-defence, was essentially unjust and from the Russian point of view it was inexcusable. In spite of the sad history of its political decay the Polish nation was not a corpse with which its stronger neighbours could experiment with impunity, and, therefore, there could be no justification for the attempt to delay its regeneration by forcibly annexing it. It is no argument to say that Poland was too weak to be an independent State and that, had Alexander refused to annex it, it would have become a province of Germany, deprived of all rights, as had been the case with other parts of Poland; while he, at any rate, left its administrative mechanism and the structure of its national life almost intact. It was easy enough to foresee that the Polish people would never be reconciled to Russian rule, however well they might be treated. The three centuries of continual war in which Poland was generally the aggressor and sometimes the victor, lay like a yawning abyss between her and Russia. Too much brotherly blood had been shed by the Poles and Russians for them to be reconciled in any other way than on a basis of perfect justice and complete recognition of each other's historic rights. Partial, half-hearted measures only made the conflict more acute and dangerously delayed the reconciliation. I may be told that

at the time of the annexation of Poland such reconciliation was impossible. This argument is hard to answer, but it by no means proves that Russia was right in doing violence to the Polish people. It would have been in every way more advantageous to us to let Prussia, alone or together with Austria, do that evil deed. No one had a right to expect Russia to save Poland; such a task was beyond her strength and not in her interests; but to lay hands on Poland, even with the best intentions, was unreasonable and unjust and Russia paid dearly for it.

This seems indisputable from the point of view of political morality, which is not sufficiently taken into account by States – even at the present day; from the point of view of Russian national interests the annexation of Poland was not merely a mistake, but a sin against Russia.

The third division of Poland had completed the historical process of 'collecting Russian lands' begun by the Grand Dukes of Muscovy and ended by Catherine II. Through these divisions of Poland, Russia did not acquire a single foot of Polish territory, whatever the Polish patriots and the European politicians and journalists, with little knowledge of Russian history, may say to the contrary. Russia contented herself with taking back her own lands which had been won from her by Lithuania, and, later on, absorbed together with the latter by Poland; these lands were but sparsely populated with Poles.

To substantiate their claim on Western Russia the Poles invented a theory of there being two distinct nationalities, Western and Southern Russians, who have nothing in common with Great Russians. They overlook the fact that the Grand Duchies of Vladimir and Moscow, constituting 'Great Russia,' were founded by the princes of Kiev and populated by Russians from the shores of the rivers Dnieper, Pripet and Berezina – by the very people whom they call Ukrainians and White Ruthenians: the names 'Little Russians' and 'White Russians' are too suggestive of the fundamental unity of the three branches of the Russian people, and the Poles refrain from using them. In spite of all the efforts of the Galician Poles and Little Russian Separatists to create for the Ukrainians a new language as remote as possible from the Russian, the

jargon invented by them, full of Polish and German words, is not readily adopted by the people and remains incomprehensible and alien to them. The old popular tongue in which Shevtchenko wrote his *Kobzar* [1] is prevalent to this day, even in the few districts of South-western Russia, which the Poles succeeded in converting to the Roman Catholic faith in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries; the fact that the population of these provinces is Catholic and the upper class is largely Polish in culture has given Poland, after her restoration, a reason for claiming the adjoining parts of Western Russia, and much more besides, so that at the present day, there are under Polish rule more than five million Russians whom the Bolsheviks have handed over to Poland by the peace treaty of Riga. The overwhelming majority of them are Orthodox, as their ancestors were.

The bitter fate of these Russian people, who suffer religious persecution and are totally deprived of rights, is known to all who are acquainted with the present situation in Poland and has been often referred to in the European press. The old attempt to colonize and catholicize White Russia and the Ukraine, which failed three centuries ago and was one of the causes of the downfall of Poland, is being repeated before our eyes. But, just as in the old days, such a policy can lead to nothing but dissension and unrest. An attempt that proved to be mistaken and impracticable in the seventeenth century is not likely to succeed in the twentieth.

After the three divisions of Poland, Russia had regained her ancient heritage, was united ethnographically and had an excellent frontier line, based upon the principle of division of nationalities.[2] The ill-fated annexation of Poland disturbed this balance and instead of the natural frontier line Russia obtained a monstrous one, deeply cutting into the German lands and hopelessly difficult to defend. Poland, irreconcilably hostile to Russia, was embodied in the Russian State and weakened it politically, having the effect of an unhealthy

[1] A book of Little Russian national poetry.

[2] It was the same frontier line that was suggested by Lord Curzon after the peace of 1919 and is known by his name. It had been accepted by the Russian delegates in Paris, but was subsequently rejected by the Powers out of consideration for the Poles.

growth or rupture. The consequences of Alexander I's thoughtless action immediately made themselves felt. The Vienna Congress was followed for Russia by a troubled century full of misunderstandings, quarrels, accusations and of bitter hostility between her and the Poles, ending in armed conflicts which engendered much resentment on either side and almost involved Russia in war with other nations. The last rising, quelled at a heavy cost to Russia, was followed by a period of quiet of which I have been a witness for more than a quarter of a century. Had this time been reasonably utilized it might have improved the relations between the Russian and the Polish people.

At the beginning of my reminiscences I have spoken about the prejudices and blunders of Russian bureaucracy in its dealings with our Polish fellow-citizens. The Poles were not always to blame for this. From the time I was in office at the Russian Legation to the Vatican, I made it a rule to soften, as far as possible, the friction that was constantly taking place, especially on religious grounds, between the Russian administration and the Polish people. My efforts in this direction often brought me into unpleasant conflict with the Ministry of Home Affairs, which regarded the Poles with ineradicable distrust, difficult to overcome. I had hoped that when I was appointed Minister of Foreign Affairs I should be able with better success to defend my own point of view with regard to Poland. But I soon realized how difficult it is for a bureaucratic State to break with firmly rooted habits and opinions. This is the case even with more advanced countries than the Russia of that period, with her highly centralized system of Government. Bureaucracy cannot be dispensed with and exists in one form or another everywhere – and is everywhere on the side of routine as against any proposed novelty. I have observed this during the many years I spent abroad and the Great War has made little change in this respect, although socially and politically it has turned Europe upside-down. The power of routine is still unbroken and in Russia it used to be overwhelming. Many of my colleagues in the Government, even those who had a thorough knowledge and experience of administration, were almost impermeable to new ideas and I could not make them see the necessity of establishing better

relations with the Poles, although Russian public opinion was no longer obsessed by the old prejudices and the bitter memories of Polish risings.

There were in the Council only two or three Ministers, except myself, who understood that it was high time to settle the Polish question by giving the Poles self-government and thus satisfying their national demands. Before the Great War there could obviously have been no question of the restoration of Polish independence. This radical measure presented, in my opinion, many advantages and would have taken a terrible burden off Russia, but it was out of the question for it would have created a dangerous precedent for Finland, which was of the first importance for the defence of St. Petersburg and of the whole North of Russia. Besides, giving up Poland would probably have involved us in a war with Germany, which owned a considerable part of the original Polish lands and was not prepared to make any concessions to them. The restoration of Poland inevitably depended upon the defeat of Germany, which at that time, of course, could not have been foreseen by anyone. It must be admitted that our Polish policy was not entirely due to the memories of the old rivalry between Russia and Poland which deeply affected their relations or to the bitter experience of Polish risings, but was very largely the result of German influence. Each time that the German Government detected the smallest tendency on the part of Russia towards reconciliation with Poland it gave us 'disinterested advice' and 'friendly warning.' These 'friendly' admonitions produced some effect and created in the Russian Government a mental attitude which Alexander II inherited, though in a somewhat weakened form, from Count Nesselrode, the Chancellor of the first two Emperors of the last century.

The German influence on the Russian policy in Poland makes itself felt to the present day and Nesselrode's theory that Russia's attitude should be 'anti-Polish' is still defended by some modern writers. This theory is essentially wrong and has done much harm to Russian interests; and from the moment that we annexed Poland it became utterly illogical. What meaning was there in Russia's ruling Poland on the basis of an 'anti-Polish' policy, and could a policy directed

against the interests of the governed be likely to bear good fruit? It was of advantage not to Russia but to Germany, the irreconcilable enemy of Poland, and made the *rapprochement* between the Russian and the Polish peoples impossible, though it was sorely needed by both of them.

Russia had reason for pursuing an anti-Polish policy only in such parts of the Empire as the North-western and the South-western provinces, where Polish nationalist propaganda was detrimental to Russian interests. Russia could not allow such propaganda in districts where the Polish element was represented by a small section of the population and was of a class character and where the propaganda in question threatened our national unity. It would have been senseless and criminal to subject White Russia and Ukraine – which were Russian in deeper antiquity than their colony, Eastern or Great Russia – to the risk of Polonization, at which Poland has aimed unremittingly, though fortunately without success, for over two centuries. The 'anti-Polish' policy was legitimate and reasonable in the administration of Western Russia and Lithuania, which has been Polonized to a certain extent, though not altogether, but it was wrong and pernicious with regard to Poland. Therefore, although Catherine's policy had to be anti-Polish, her successors, beginning with Alexander I, ought to have drawn a strict line between the legitimate desires of the Poles in their own country and the ambitious designs of Polish chauvinists in the districts that had once been a part of the Russo-Lithuanian State.

Unfortunately for Russia such a line had never been drawn and both Poland and Western Russia were ruled after the same rather elementary pattern. Most of the Russian administrators were military men and looked upon their duties solely from the point of view of the security of our Western frontier. They were either wholly absorbed by the insoluble task of defending our worthless frontier, open on three sides to German attack, or accepting, without any criticism, the traditional view of the relations between Russia and Poland and were unable to introduce into these relations anything new and fresh. I have already mentioned what the Central Government's attitude to the subject was. My voice was the voice of one crying in the wilderness; I saw the danger that others did

not suspect. A good illustration of my position is afforded by a certain meeting of the Council of Ministers in July, 1915. It had to discuss the statement which our President was to make at the opening of the Duma informing it that the Tsar had commanded the Government to draw up a Bill for giving Poland, when the war was over, the right freely to order her national, cultural and economic life on the basis of autonomy. I protested, saying that such a statement would be quite out of date and that the question of Polish autonomy ought to be settled at once by a manifesto from the Tsar without waiting for the opening of the Duma. I knew that the Poles had been anxiously waiting for such a manifesto and would be duly impressed by it, especially as they were complaining of the wavering character of our policy. I was convinced that the hopes roused by the Grand Duke Nicholas's proclamation at the beginning of the war sustained them no longer and that the Tsar's words could alone renew their confidence and prevent them from putting their trust in the Germans, who were ready to do a great deal to bribe them. I insisted on this all the more because hapless Poland was in the grip of the enemy and in danger of soon being completely at his mercy.

I felt certain that in urging the Government to say at that critical moment words of encouragement to the Poles I was acting not only in their, but also in our, interests. My suggestion, however, was met with lively opposition; various objections were raised which are not worth while quoting here, for all of them were, in my opinion, groundless. Not a single member of the Council voted for my proposal. The events that followed proved soon enough that I had been right, but it was too late then to do anything and all that remained to my opponents was to acknowledge their mistake – which it was not their custom to do.

Poland was the subject of frequent conversations between the Tsar and myself. I tried, while remaining on the ground of Russian national interests, to persuade his Majesty that, apart from any sentimentality, it was possible to combine the interests of Russia with the desires of the majority of her Polish subjects, watching impartially over both. It was difficult, of course, to please every one, and, indeed, there was no need to do so, but it was easy enough to satisfy the legitimate demands

of the majority, especially as at that time the Poles did not, as yet, ask for independence. They only began to have hopes of this when they saw that the Entente Powers were likely to be victorious and that the Central Power in Russia was tottering under the onslaught of Bolshevism.

The Tsar listened attentively and sympathetically to what I had to say about Poland. The rebellion of 1830 and Paskevich's exploits were for men of his generation a thing of the past. The bloody rising of 1863 had been put down several years before he was born; he was free from the painful memories of his elders who had never been able to get over them. Gentle and good-natured, he was pleased to meet any desires that seemed to him just. Poland was no exception, and the only reason why his sympathy for the Poles had no decisive effect was that Russia has never had a Tsar less autocratic than Nicholas II. In this case, too, as almost always, his intentions were good but his will was not his own. The Tsar's advisers, whose duty it was to direct the Russian policy in Poland, were a hindrance to him rather than a help. Sovereigns and rulers are judged by their deeds, but to some of them, such as Nicholas II, Louis XVI and others, it would be unfair to apply this test; they should be judged by their intentions. As a rule such sovereigns expiate with their death their own weakness and the sins of their age, and are not condemned by history.

Internal and external events developed unfavourably for Russia and, as it were, independently of the will of those who directed Russian politics. The position at the Front was not to our advantage, but it was far from hopeless and, in spite of our shortage of munitions, the German advance had been checked. We only had to wait for the arrival of the munitions, which our Allies were sending us, in order to resume the offensive after the wearisome months of retreat and defensive warfare. Our position was considerably complicated by the fact that munitions were brought to us either through distant Vladivostok or through Archangel, which could never be relied on because it was ice-bound in winter and the Murmansk railway line to it was inadequate. This line was being built with feverish haste and was concluded after a fashion in 1916, though a great deal had still to be done to make it quite

satisfactory. All this was difficult and complicated, but things were improving and by the spring of 1917 the railway was in good working order.

I was far from agreeing with those who spoke with apprehension about our position at the Front; it seemed infinitely superior to the position at home. The removal of the undesirable Ministers, from which I had expected a great deal, in no way improved the situation. Goremykin's successor, Stürmer, a man who had left a bad memory wherever he occupied an administrative post, was placed at the head of the Government at the instigation of the Rasputin clique, with which he was on the most intimate terms. Rasputin's friends succeeded in interesting the Empress in his career and she patronized him up to the day of his downfall, which happened some two years later. She hardly knew Stürmer personally, but that did not matter: he lavished upon her expressions of loyalty – and the persons in whom she believed with all the fervour of her sick soul, assured her that he was the very man Russia needed. The same thing happened later about the half-insane Protopopov, another candidate selected by these powers of darkness. The Empress cared very little about people's real characters; if they were approved by the Imperial family's friend and intercessor they inspired her with boundless confidence and an equally boundless hostility towards their opponents.

Stürmer's appointment as head of the Government was badly received by the Duma and the general public. His Austrian name prejudiced against him those who knew nothing about him. But such people were comparatively few and were only to be found in places far distant from the centre of the Empire; others were opposed to him for better reasons and blamed him for various unseemly actions of which he had been guilty as a Government official. The extreme conservatism of which he boasted roused the suspicions of many and did not increase the number of his friends who were few. Some of the extreme right members of the State Council thought like he did and were ready to back him: but indeed Stürmer had little need of friends: the Rasputin circle which had its home in the old-fashioned house of Madame Vyrubova near the Alexandrovsky Palace at Tsarskoié-Sélo, and was patronized by the Empress, warmly supported him.

In the beginning Stürmer combined the duties of President of the Council of Ministers with those of Minister of Home Affairs. This, however, only lasted for a few months and even during that time he left the work of the Ministry to his friend Count A. A. Bobrinsky, with whom he was in close touch through the Council of State. Bobrinsky reported to the Council on matters relating to Home Affairs without any help from Stürmer. Persons who happened to be present during those reports had the impression that neither the Minister nor his delegate knew anything about the subject.

The post of Minister of Home Affairs did not suffice to satisfy Stürmer: it involved too heavy a responsibility and was not brilliant enough for his ambition. He therefore set his heart on the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, which, he thought, would give more satisfaction to his vanity. He never troubled to think of the difficulties that awaited him in a sphere of action utterly unfamiliar to him, intending to make his subordinates do all the hard work and reserving the laurels for himself. It did not take him long to attain his aim, but I shall have to speak about my resignation later on. Stürmer's diplomatic career was shorter than he had expected. I will not discuss him as a Minister of Foreign Affairs; his activities provided food for endless jokes and were estimated at their true value by all the Foreign Representatives in Petrograd.

CHAPTER XIV

I HAVE told the history of my attempt to secure self-government for Poland while retaining her within the Russian Empire. My failure was due partly to the political prejudices of my colleagues in the Council and partly to their personal dislike of me; it did not convince me that the moment for my proposal had been badly chosen. I firmly believed that our Army would be victorious in spite of the difficult position it was in during the summer of 1915 – owing, I thought, to temporary causes; but the progress of military operations confirmed my conviction that it would be dangerous for the future of the Empire to leave any longer to chance the position of our most important borderland.

The anxiety and the disappointment of the Poles reached its climax when we evacuated Poland and the Germans occupied Warsaw. Many of them lost faith in our ability to save them from Germany and even in our desire to do anything by way of compensating them for the enthusiasm with which they joined our ranks to fight our common enemy [1] and for the terrible sacrifices, both moral and material, that Poland had to endure since the beginning of the war. I had no doubt that the German and Austrian Governments would utilize the position against Russia and make false promises in order to annex, more or less openly, the Polish lands which lay outside their boundaries.

I knew very well how deeply rooted was the Poles' distrust of the Germans and I was certain they would not easily succumb to German temptations. Nevertheless, the position of the Polish people was so trying that their despair and disappointment might well drive them to seek help from the Germans rather than remain defenceless between two fires and run the risk of destruction. There was no doubt, of course, that it was only from Russia that Poland could obtain the priceless boon of national unification which she desired so passionately. The Central Powers, so far from wanting such a unification, regarded it as highly dangerous to themselves and if they took over Russian Poland they would merely divide Polish lands

[1] Unfortunately, there were some exceptions to this. Some Poles fought from the beginning of the war on the side of Austria against Russia.

between them once more. Knowledge of this was a powerful preventive against the Poles taking any rash step, but one could not be certain of anything at a time when the Russian troops were leaving Poland farther and farther behind, and the Germans had occupied the whole of it and a part of White Russia as well. It was essential that Russia, in the person of the Tsar, should proclaim her plan for the national regeneration of Poland before the Central Powers had had time, under the pretext of restoring Poland, finally to dismember her. It was not sufficient this time to speak in general terms of uniting the scattered fragments of Poland and giving freedom to her religious and cultural life; it was necessary to secure her political existence, granting her, to begin with, a complete system of self-government in internal affairs. Soon after this the Polish question would, in all probability, have been finally settled and the bond that tied Russia and Poland together and was equally burdensome to both would have ceased to exist.

But there ought to be no delay; the ray of hope that was to lighten the darkness of the Russo-Polish relations was needed at once to make it morally easier for the Poles to bear the German invasion.

I was often told in answer to this argument that the Poles would have disbelieved any promises of the Russian Government, especially those given under the pressure of war. I did not deny this, for I knew that a great many Poles had a fanatical hatred of Russia; and also knew among what social class these enemies of my country were to be found. But I was certain that the Polish masses did not hate Russia; they knew that they owed their welfare to Russian administration. The peasants realized very clearly that the system of land tenure which provided a secure foundation for their economic welfare had been given them by Russia and they had no hatred for her, in spite of all the anti-Russian propaganda. In other classes of the Polish population elements not infected with a blind hatred for everything Russian could also be found. This was the case with Poles who had been educated in Russian schools and had imbibed Russian culture; without breaking their connection with Poland they lived for years in Russia, appreciated the Russians' kindness to them and returned

home prosperous. A great many people could be found among the Poles to whom it was worth while for the Russian Emperor to speak and who would not have rejected, especially at so critical a time, his promise of a new era in Russo-Polish relations.

Without expecting help from anyone I decided to take the task of reconciling Russia and Poland into my own hands and to do my utmost to get out of the impasse in which we have been for centuries. It was an ambitious dream, but it had an overwhelming attraction for me. If our reconciliation was to be attained at all, to the good of the Russians and the Poles, and indeed of all Slavs, it had to be done at the initiative of the Russian Tsar at that very moment or never. I had no hope of getting my colleagues in the Council duly interested in a question the political significance of which most of them failed to grasp. Some suffered from a hereditary dislike for the Poles, others unconsciously were accustomed to look at them from the German point of view, the third did not rise beyond the cares and interests of their own department and left politics alone. Only two or three realized the significance of the Polish question for Russia and for Europe as a whole. Europe's interest in the matter was brought to my notice by the French Ambassador, M. Paléologue, who tried to persuade me that the question should be dealt with internationally. I could not, of course, agree to this, for I thought that the Polish question could only be fairly settled by the Russian Tsar. I did not deny its European significance, but as a Russian Minister, I could not forget that Poland was not merely united to Russia by the resolution of the Vienna Congress, but since then had been twice conquered by Russia after the risings of 1830 and 1863, the moral responsibility for which rested to a great extent upon the French Government.

In my friendly and informal conversation with M. Paléologue I pointed out to him that former attempts on the part of France to interfere in one way or another with the destinies of Poland had ended badly for them both. I did not go so far back as the times of Henry III of Valois, but reminded him of the capture of the town of Danzig by the Russian Field-Marshal Munnich, of the French protégé, King Stanislas Leszczynski's flight from Poland, of Napoleon's unsuccessful attempt to

create a duchy of Warsaw, after his defeat of Prussia and in anticipation of the Russian War – an attempt which brought no advantages to France and a bitter disappointment to the Poles – and finally of the way in which the French Government had encouraged the Polish revolutionaries whose risings in the last century ended disastrously for Poland. These risings had a bad effect upon France as well, for they made the Emperor Alexander II feel hostile towards Napoleon III and induced him to take up an attitude of friendly neutrality towards Prussia in the war of 1870, which ended for France in the loss of Alsace-Lorraine.

'If I were a Frenchman or a Pole,' I said one day to the Ambassador, 'I should have a superstitious dread either of patronizing Poland or of accepting the patronage of France.'

My conversations with M. Paléologue ended at that, and we did not return to this delicate subject any more. The British Ambassador, Sir George Buchanan, never touched upon it at all. Nevertheless I fully realized that although Poland had not been an independent State for the last hundred and twenty years, she had not lost her European significance, and the World War would once more attract Europe's attention to her. It was all the more essential for Russia not to relinquish the Polish question and not to allow it to be settled by other Powers in a way unfavourable to Russian interests. After the whole of Poland had been overrun by German troops it would have been an insult to the national dignity of the Poles to grant them the right of local self-government which they vainly sought to obtain before the war; they would have indignantly rejected it. We had to give Poland all that was compatible with Russia's interests, looking forward instead of looking back, and fully realizing that the first step would have to be inevitably followed by the second as soon as circumstances were favourable. This second step meant giving Poland her independence and freeing Russia from a heavy burden which during a hundred years had prevented the latter from drawing up to her colossal stature. It was too early to think of that happy day at a time when the end of the war was not yet in sight and developments at the front were unfavourable to the Allies. Besides, our public opinion was not prepared for a complete severance between Russia and Poland.

People were ready to welcome the autonomy of Poland, but, failing to realize how dangerous it was for us to own Poland, thought that her independence would be a menace to Russia and dubbed 'traitors' those who worked to that end. A year later a great change had taken place and it was possible for the words 'independent Poland' to appear in an official document, even before the Revolution had swept the country.

It was as yet impossible to pass from words to deeds, but it was imperative to say the words so as definitely to announce the breach with the old order and the coming of the new, and thus take the initiative of a political act which would have had nothing to equal it in the history of Russia except the liberation of the serfs.

This act of the Russian Tsar should have consisted in granting a constitutional charter to the Polish people. It is quite possible that even then a certain class of Poles would have remained sceptical and recalled the fate of Alexander I's Polish constitution, but Nicholas II ought not to have been daunted by such distrust. A whole century would have elapsed between the first and the second Polish constitutions. During that time a great deal had changed in the mental attitude and the general position of Russia and of Europe, and of Poland herself, the latter being made wiser through bitter experience and disappointed in her hopes.

The moment was favourable and further delay seemed to me full of danger. In occupying Poland the Austro-Germans held out to the Polish people no promises likely to give them hopes of a better future. Such hopes would, of course, in any case, have proved false, for there was no doubt that Germany would always be faithful to her anti-Polish policy, but from the Russian point of view even deceitful promises were dangerous. The Austro-German manifesto published in the autumn of 1916 announced the restoration of Poland; in truth, however, so far from gaining independence, she was made a vassal of the Central Powers. The Polish people were not deceived by this manifesto.

In the summer of 1916, having failed to interest the Council of Ministers in the Polish question I decided to address myself directly to the Tsar. I submitted to him a detailed report on the subject and obtained his permission to compile the draft

of a bill for a Polish constitution for his approval. I considered it my duty to inform Stürmer, the President of the Council, of this permission, although I knew he would merely try to circumvent me.

I pursued no unattainable aim in elaborating my bill and only hoped that the Poles would regard Nicholas II's constitutional charter as a proof of his readiness to abandon the old system of ruling Poland – a system which made no allowances for her national claims although it secured her internal order and economic prosperity.

I entrusted to Baron Nolde, who was my adviser in matters of international law, the working out the bill in detail. After he had done so, the draft was passed on to the Secretary of State, S. E. Kryzhanovsky, who had to see that it was in full accordance with the laws of the Empire. I then took it to Mohilyov to present it to His Majesty; but first I acquainted General Alexeiev, the Chief of Staff, with its contents. Alexeiev was a remarkable man in every way, highly intelligent, wonderfully industrious and modest. I attached great value to his opinion and considered it would be useful to know what he thought of my bill since under certain circumstances its strategic significance might be of more account than its political merits. Although General Alexeiev was overwhelmed with work and was already suffering from the disease which brought him to his grave a year later, he found time to study my bill and volunteered to defend it before the Tsar. The day after I arrived, I begged His Majesty to invite the Chief of Staff to be present at my report which I was to make the following morning.

At the appointed hour we both came to the Governor's house, where the Tsar was living, and I told him in detail of the reasons why I requested him to publish as soon as possible a manifesto granting a constitutional government to Poland. The bill was read to the Tsar in full and His Majesty asked me questions which proved how interested he was in the subject. After I had finished, General Alexeiev analysed it from the point of view of the military safety of the Empire and in conclusion urged that it should be unreservedly accepted.

I waited with a natural impatience for the Tsar's decision. After some thought he said that he approved of my plan and believed that the moment for the publication of the bill was

appropriate. I then asked His Majesty's permission to inform the Prime Minister Stürmer of his will and to submit the bill to the Council on the following week. The Tsar immediately gave me the permission. At the same time I thought it my duty to warn him that my bill would be sure to meet with the opposition of the majority of the Ministers, including the President of the Council, and that at best I could only reckon on the support of three of my colleagues. In answer the Tsar reminded me that according to law the minority overruled the majority if he was on the side of the former. I knew the paragraph of the law to which the Tsar referred and said I would repeat his words to Stürmer, although I was certain that he would use every means in his power to delay the passing of my Bill through the Council.

This was on June 29, 1916. The following morning I returned to Petrograd and went to tell Stürmer of the Tsar's command that the Council should consider the Bill of the Polish Constitution without delay. I saw from Stürmer's expression that the fears I had expressed to the Tsar were well founded.

Ill-health caused by physical and moral strain compelled me to go for a few days to Finland to recruit my strength for further labours in the oppressive atmosphere of Petrograd. During my absence things that were of importance not to me alone took place. The Council of Ministers came to the conclusion that in war-time it was impossible to discuss the Polish question and that my Bill was, therefore, 'inopportune.' This word has played a fatal part in the history of the Russian State. It has served as a pretext for burying a great number of reasonable and ardently desired reforms, for which the time was fully ripe. In the present case the death-knell sounded by Stürmer and his friends over my attempt at reconciliation with Poland had done the latter no irretrievable harm. A band of revolutionaries belonging to the Communist party, liberally subsidized by Germany and supported by the elements which had long, though fruitlessly, tried to destroy Russia from within, settled the Polish question after their own fashion; and while they were about it, they disposed of the Russian State, too, transforming it into a land of wretched slaves, dispossessed of all human rights, subject to pitiless extermination and deprived even of the glorious name of their great country which

is now called by a collective nickname which says nothing to the heart or mind.

There is no doubt that the Russian Revolution settled the Polish question quicker and more radically than would have been done by the Imperial Government which was in the hands of men with no real power or strength of character. But has it been settled justly and permanently? The answer must be in the negative if only because Russia has had no part in the settlement of it and her national interests have been overlooked. Carried away by the unexpected happiness of seeing their country restored and finding that Germany had fallen from the heights to which Bismarck had raised her and that Russia was bleeding to death in her struggle with the revolution, the Polish patriots were overcome with megalomania, an old hereditary disease of the Poles, and began building up the new Polish State without any regard to ethnographical boundaries, apparently forgetting that a similar line of conduct had brought Poland to grief before. The Poles began their work of reconstruction, so to speak, from the tail end, deciding beforehand that the frontiers of the new Poland must be as near as possible to the frontiers she had before the first division, and altogether disregarding the existence of the Russian people. I was in Paris when M. Paderewski came there to thank France in the name of the Polish people for the powerful help the French had rendered them in rebuilding the Polish State. The famous artist who seemed to the romantic Poles the very embodiment of their national ideals had a triumphal reception in Paris. Reading the description of it in the newspapers I was struck by the statement which M. Paderewski made at the station to the representatives of the French and foreign press; he spoke of Poland, which had scarcely risen to her feet, as of a State with a population of thirty-five millions; and yet every one knows that the Poles number only twenty millions. I wondered where he was going to get the remaining fifteen millions. But at moments of patriotic enthusiasm Poles have never troubled about such questions and have settled them simply enough. Next door to Poland were the White Russian and Ukrainian lands with a population of five and a half millions, who had returned to the bosom of Russia after the division of Poland, preserving a sad memory of the Polish

dominion. Then there were the fragments of Lithuania, Polonized to a certain extent, with the town of Vilno, the ancient capital of the Lithuanian princes. The Poles wanted all these lands to round off their own and make it into a considerable European State capable in case of need of defending its own existence and of being a useful ally to France in the always possible case of a war with Germany. The advance of the Bolshevik hordes on Warsaw in 1920 had very nearly been crowned with success and was only repulsed owing to the arrival of one of the best French Generals and a great number of officers and technicians to reinforce the Polish Army; the Bolsheviks concluded peace with the Poles at Riga, giving up to the latter the Russian lands that have just been mentioned. There was nobody to defend the unhappy population of these lands when it passed from the Bolshevik hell to the power of a hostile people it had long been accustomed to hate. It leads now a miserable existence, deprived of a national school and a literary language, and its religious freedom is interfered with in every possible way. The Polish Government energetically denies all this, referring to the liberal articles of their constitution which guarantee equal rights to all Polish subjects. The Polish Constitution is certainly liberal enough, but the administrative practice by no means conforms to it, and the rulings of the League of Nations about the rights of minorities, though they are as compulsory for Poland as for other States created by the Great War, remain so far a dead letter.

This difference between practice and theory makes itself felt in a particularly painful way with regard to the religious life of the numerous Orthodox population of Poland. During the last five years the Polish Government has adopted a series of measures which admit of no justification, however great may be one's good-will towards Poland. The autocephalia of the Orthodox Church in Poland [1] was established by violent and non-canonical methods; bishops, who had been appointed in

[1] The Polish Government themselves understand that they cannot on their own authority make the Orthodox Church in Poland autocephalic and so, rejecting the lawful jurisdiction of the Patriarch of Moscow, they unlawfully recognized that of the Patriarch of Constantinople, who had ceased to have power over the Russian Church five hundred years ago.

accordance with canonical rules and were loved and respected by their flock, were banished from their dioceses and confined in monasteries – sometimes Roman Catholic ones – where no one was allowed to see them, not even their confessors; others were deported without any means of subsistence. Churches and cathedrals were taken away under the plea that some of them had once belonged to the Uniates, although as a matter of fact there were no more Uniates left, since some of them had joined the Roman Catholic Church and the majority had reverted to their ancient Orthodox Church. Monasteries were closed and their property confiscated. At the instigation of lay authorities and, against the wishes of the diocese, the banished bishops were replaced, for the most part, by unworthy men noted solely for their servility towards the Polish Government. These facts are sufficient evidence of the state of things in the Western Russia handed over by the Soviet Government to Poland; but, although they find reflection in the Polish press, the protests of the few Russian members of the Seym against such injustice have so far been vain.

For over a century Poland had bitterly complained to the whole world of the violence done to her national and religious rights; and although it must be granted that her outcry was not always groundless, her present policy in the Western Russian provinces annexed by her deserves the severest censure. Poland had complained that her national feeling and the Roman Catholic Church suffered at the hands of her conquerors – and all Western Europe sympathized with her. But there is nothing to be said for Poland now that she, having conquered no one except Bolshevik bandits, has herself committed within five years worse sins than those which she had so violently denounced.

This being the case, have the Polish patriots a right to repeat their old accusations against Russia? The divisions of the Polish lands was a grave wrong which only the European War has rectified. But it is just as great a wrong – indeed a greater one if judged by modern standards – to seize Russian lands inhabited by a Russian population accustomed to regard the Poles as an enemy of their faith and their country. As a State Russia exists no longer, and as a people she is oppressed by the most hideous despotism that the world has ever seen. Her

weak voice protesting against the violence that is being done to her is only heard by those who want to hear it, and nowadays such men are few. In Poland the Russian protests are intentionally drowned by the trumpet blasts of national regeneration; as to other countries they had mostly taken interest in the Russian people out of hostility to the Russian Government and now they no longer take any. The Russian friends of France had hoped that, having once become the patron of Poland, she would in the interests of the latter, and partly in her own, try to bridle the short-sighted Polish Imperialism and prevent the Poles from including in their State alien elements which cannot be assimilated and merely serve to weaken the Polish State.[1]

The Poles have a deep-rooted conviction that in order to be strong Poland must be great; there are of course plenty of reasonable and far-seeing men among them who think differently, but no one listens to them. The French Government has not done anything to check this dangerous fallacy, though perhaps it does not share it. There is no doubt that owing to the connivance of France the new Poland, occupying a space almost as big as Germany and with 45 per cent alien population, has developed a strong resemblance to the Hapsburg Monarchy which came to grief precisely owing to its lack of racial unity. Is this what the Polish people and their friends have been striving for? A united Poland, capable of healthy growth, is needed by Europe; a Poland hastily knocked together out of bits and fragments of the neighbouring States is more likely to be a menace to Europe than a bulwark of peace. A policy based on the assumption that the Soviet oligarchy will go on for ever and that Germany will always remain weak may lead to surprises which might seriously

[1] Realizing that the Russian element in the Eastern provinces which she has annexed is intractable and may be a danger to her, Poland has started colonizing these provinces with her own people. The lands taken from the big landowners – chiefly Russian – are divided not between the local Russian peasants, who are badly in need of land, but between the Polish new-comers. This affords another proof of the fact how little the Polish Government is inclined to abide by the Versailles treaty which imposes upon it duties with regard to national minorities. It will probably take the League of Nations a long time to become a real force instead of a judicial fiction.

endanger the peace not only of Europe, but of the world as a whole. Poland as she is now is an artificial construction. The French Government, in true friendship to her, could have taken upon itself the difficult but noble task of reconciling the Polish and the Russian people after four centuries of hostility and thus securing the political peace of Eastern Europe. I do not think that a more favourable moment could have been found for it than that of the restoration of Poland. The opportunity has not yet been irretrievably lost. The revolutionary wave that has submerged Russia is bound to recede, and Russia, transformed and vigorous, will once more become of first-rate importance in the political and economic life of Europe. She was prepared to change her attitude to Poland through having fought side by side with her against a common enemy. The Poles on their side would be hardly likely to press their unjust claims on West Russia if France, their patron, pointed out to them the dangers of the path they have chosen. Unfortunately, so far France has not taken the opportunity really to pacify Eastern Europe. The French Government has not had the courage to do so: the fear of estranging the Poles has outweighed all other considerations. Poland is now wedged in between two neighbours each of them stronger than herself and considering themselves injured by her. Her third neighbour, Lithuania, though less dangerous than the others and restored to political independence under the same conditions as Poland herself, has suffered more than all the rest from the latter's unrestrained imperialism. Europe has recognized Lithuania as an independent State within frontiers that were fairly correct ethnographically. But at the very time when this seemed to have become a reality in virtue of the Polish-Lithuania agreement at Suvalki and the League of Nations' decision to give Vilno to Lithuania, General Zheligovsky occupied Vilno with his troops, depriving Lithuania of its historical capital. Lithuanian protests were of no avail; Polish public opinion supported the Government and declared Vilno to be the inalienable property of Poland; the League of Nations had to give way before an accomplished fact. It is difficult to say what the relations between Poland and Lithuania are likely to be in the future, but there is little reason to expect that they will be friendly.

I will say nothing more about the complicated international relations that have arisen through Poland assuming the strange shape and size it has on the new map of Europe. This would lead me too far beyond the subject of my reminiscences. I should like to end them by expressing, in the name of my numerous fellow-countrymen who have a genuine friendship for Poland, a sincere desire that the restoration of Polish independence should inaugurate a new era in our relations. It would be a blessing both to Russia and Poland if the four hundred years' hostility between them were succeeded by brotherly concord and permanent peace, based upon a fair division of territory, and a just recognition of each other's rights, without which the stability of Eastern Europe cannot be secured.

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